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ANGELA HEARD HER NAME SPOKEN IN A VOICE WHOSE SOUND SENT EVERY DROP OF BLOOD RUSHING TO HER HEART.

VICTOR'S FATE

[A NOVELETTE.]

Complete in this Number.

By the Author of
"The Secret of Years," "Marigold,"
"A Tangled Web," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

GREYCOMBE is a little town situated in the dreary fen country. Strangers are in the habit of speaking of it as a village; but this is an indignity strongly resented by its inhabitants, who for the most part have been born and bred there, and, in

consequence, look upon it as a by no means unimportant portion of the King's dominions. For eleven months three weeks and some odd days in the year it is as sleepy and dull as any place need wish to be, but for the first week in October it wakes up into boisterous, not to say rowdy life.

Then the annual "fair" is in progress. You are confronted on every side by pigs, sheep and oxen; and mixed up with these in a confusion that is, to the uninitiated, "worse confounded," are booths, shooting galleries, gingerbread stalls, "cheap Jacks," and caravans of every sort and description.

All the town turns out to see them; and on this particular evening of which I write the new doctor, who had lately come to Greycombe, was among the rest of the crowd—a tall, handsome young fellow of not more than five-and-

twenty, fair-haired and blue-eyed as some young Viking.

His name was Victor Bethall, and although he had only been settled in Greycombe for twelve months or so, he was already accredited with a good deal of talent, and had made a very fair practice for himself in the place.

"Hulloa, doctor, come to see the shows!" exclaimed a fat, jolly-looking farmer, accosting the young man from behind. "Better than usual they be this year—well worth having a peep at!"

"Are they?" queried the young man, smiling. "I suppose I must follow where the rest of you lead. Which of the 'shows' do you recommend?"

"Well," answered the farmer, scratching his head in some embarrassment, as if amid such a group of attractions it was rather

difficult to make a selection. "They be all good. There's the Fat Lady, and the Pig-faced Lady, and the Spotted Boy; but perhaps you would rather see a conjuring fellow over there who eats fire, and spins balls, and makes a arch over his head with cards, and swallows canary birds, cage and all! Never seed such a wonderful man in my life before!"

"All right, I'll go and have a look at him," responded Bethell; and accordingly he made his way to the booth, over the door of which was inscribed in large letters — "England's Home of Mystery!"

Inside, he found a throng of open-mouthed rustics, all crowding round a man, who, on a slightly raised platform was going through the tricks of his trade. He was a small, dark, wiry man, with sinister black eyes, whose glances flashed round with lightning-like swiftness, and whose tongue seemed dowered with the same rapidity.

Victor watched him for a few seconds from the edge of the crowd—for there was no getting near him—and then sauntered slowly into an inner enclosure, shut off from the larger ones by dark curtains, and labelled "The Witches' Cave." Let those who would read the future enter."

There was nothing very alarming in the interior. It was simply a small tent, hung round with curtains, and having at one end a mirror wreathed about with branches of evergreens that partially concealed its surface. On one side of it stood a woman, apparently of middle age, draped from head to foot in a long garment, embroidered all over with mystical devices, and having some sort of tinsel crown on her head, and a long wand, crescent-tipped, in her hand.

She seemed slightly surprised when she saw her visitor, but recovered herself almost immediately, and said:—

"What would you that the Prophetess should unfold to you?"

Bethell looked a little discomposed, for he was not prepared for the question.

"Tell me anything—what you like," he responded, with a slight laugh.

"Then you shall see her to whom your troth shall be plighted," said the Witch, shrewdly judging from his youthful appearance that he was unmarried.

He nodded assent, and then noticed for the first time that a small tripod stood in front of the mirror, bearing a brass chafing dish, into which the woman shook some powder. On this she poured a colourless liquid from a small phial that she took from her bosom, and directly afterwards a blue flame sprang up, diffusing a silvery mist through the apartment, and scattering at the same time a pungent, but not unpleasant odour.

Victor watched the proceedings with attention, for the sound of her voice had been enough to tell him that his companion was by no means on a level with the ordinary conjuror's assistant, and there was a well-preserved air of mystery about her movements that was calculated to impress even an educated observer.

"Look!" she exclaimed, imperatively, pointing with one hand into the mirror, while a shower of silvery music, coming apparently from a distance, and only just audible, broke forth as she spoke.

He fixed his eyes on the mirror, which was partially obscured by the floating vapours from the chafing dish. Slowly they rolled away; and then, between the overhanging boughs of the fir and other evergreens surrounding it, he saw a girl—very young, very beautiful, and wrapped round in some diaphanous white garment, out of which her face rose like a delicately-tinted flower.

He saw her quite distinctly—each line, each feature, even the soft golden ringlets of her hair, and yet she seemed at a great distance from him, and even as he looked grew vaguer and vaguer, until she finally faded into the mist that again obscured the surface of the mirror.

The woman was watching him intently. As he turned round she smiled coldly.

"Are you satisfied?" she asked.

"The illusion is a clever one," he returned, looking about the tent with a view of discovering how it was effected.

She seemed to divine his motive, for she said with some scorn:—

"If it be an illusion, it is one whose origin you will never find out."

And in good truth Victor confessed himself at fault, for, as far as he could see, there was no arrangement in the tent by means of which the girl's figure could have been projected into the mirror.

He went out thoughtful and preoccupied. The girl's face haunted him strangely. Lovely as it was, it was not its beauty so much as its deep sadness that impressed him; but, as a matter of fact, he could not rid himself of the remembrance, although he called himself a "fool" for giving even a second thought to the matter.

But the desire for sight-seeing had deserted him, and he made his way as quickly as he could through the noisy crowd until he came to a small house at one end of the market-place, where the curate had lodgings.

The curate was a young man of his own age, who had been at college with him, and the two were great friends. They were both of a somewhat scientific turn of mind, given to arguing even when they agreed with each other, and forgetting the flight of time in the interest of their discussions. To-night it was after twelve o'clock when they separated, and quietude once more reigned supreme over Greycombe.

The Greycombes had a wholesome respect for the maxim of "early to bed, early to rise," and even on occasions of wild dissipation like the Fair they contrived to finish their orgies before midnight; consequently, as Victor threaded his steps through the various caravans he did not meet a single creature—save, indeed, one snarling dog, who manifested a somewhat too eager affection for his calves, and received a kick in return.

The young man's house was about half a mile distant from the market-place, and at the extreme end of the village—not a very good site for a doctor's residence; but the jerry-builder had not yet made his appearance in Greycombe, and houses were scarce. People manifested no inclination to quit the homes in which they and their parents had been born, consequently a newcomer had to put up with what he could get.

Victor walked slowly, for it was a lovely night, with just the faintest touch of frost in the air, and lighted up by a million sparkles of diamond radiance from the stars above.

Once, when quite near his own home, the young man fancied he heard something on the other side of the low edge, and he stood for a minute under the shadow of a tree to look over and see what it was.

Just then he became aware of another presence advancing along the road, and he remained quite still waiting until it had passed. It was the figure of a woman—a young woman, he decided, from the quick, light footstep—who was wrapped in a dark cloak, the hood of which was drawn over her head so as to conceal her features.

When she was opposite to him she caught sight of the end of his cigar, which glowed redly in the darkness, and it seemed to startle her, for she came to a sudden pause, and turned her face round so that he saw it fully. A moment later, and she had passed swiftly on, while Bethell stepped out into the road again, conscious of a strange thrill of half superstitious surprise. For the face revealed to him in that momentary glance was none other than the one he had seen in the magic mirror earlier in the evening!

If he had been given to delusions he might have fancied himself under the influence of one now. But this was not the case. A clearer-headed man did not exist, and the only con-

fusion he could come to was that this self-same girl had posed as the original of the supposed phantom in the conjuror's tent.

But what was she doing here, alone, and at this time of night?

Bethell told himself it was no business of his; but, all the same, he made up his mind to follow her, and find out her destination.

In order to do this without being observed he vaulted lightly over the low hedge, on the other side of which was a narrow footpath.

His own house was on the opposite side of the way, and he had soon passed it, keeping the girl in view by looking over the top of the hedge now and again.

At length she paused in front of some high iron gates, and after glancing cautiously around as if to assure herself there was no one in sight, she entered the cemetery—for such it was—by a smaller gate at the side of the others, which was always kept unlocked.

Victor was more and more puzzled. This quiet graveyard seemed a strange place for a young girl to seek after midnight on an autumn night. Moreover, she did not enter it hesitatingly, but with the firm, assured mien of someone who has a definite object in view.

If he had followed directly in her footsteps it is more than probable that she would have seen him, so he went on a little farther up the road to another gate leading into the cemetery. The fact that this was locked offered no impediment, for Victor was as light and agile as a panther, and swung himself over with perfect ease.

Then came the task of finding the girl, and it was a difficult one, for in this uncertain light the crosses and head-stones cast strange shadows on the flat green mounds, beneath which the "quiet dead" were sleeping. Besides, there were several trees—for the most part weeping willows—and these obstructed his view.

Presently, however, he emerged into a small open space, which was as yet innocent of tombstones, and here he was confronted by a sight that would live in his memory till the day of his death.

In the middle of this green space stood the young girl, her figure and face both clearly visible in the starlight. She had thrown off her cloak, which lay in a heap on the ground, and he could see that she wore a shabby grey dress, made with the utmost simplicity, while her uncovered hair lay over her shoulders in a tangled mass of golden waves.

Both her arms were stretched out at full length, and in her hands she held something that glittered like steel in the starlight.

It was a pistol!

The moment this conviction flashed with horrified certainty on Victor's mind he knew what she intended. She had come here with the object of taking her own life!

"Stop!" he cried, his voice sounding strange and unnatural in its tenseness of fear. "For the love of Heaven, stop!"

But the warning came too late. The report of the pistol rang out clear and distinct on the midnight air, and a second later the girl lay prone on her face on the green sward.

CHAPTER II.

To say that Victor Bethell was horrified is to say little, but professional feelings almost instantly overcame emotional ones, and he hurried forward, and raised the unfortunate girl in his arms, while he tried to discover whether the heart still beat.

Yes—faintly, it is true, but still sufficiently to convince him that life was not extinct, although consciousness had departed. The blood was flowing copiously from a wound above the left breast.

The girl had aimed at her heart, but, either from inexperience in the handling of firearms, or from fright when Victor's warning cry fell on her ears, had aimed too high.

Not for one minute did the young man hesitate as to his plan of action. His own house was the only one at hand, and he instantly decided to take her to it.

The wound, though not dangerous in itself, would yet prove dangerous if it were neglected, for the girl would bleed to death unless remedies were quickly applied.

She was very light—a mere feather-weight to our muscular young doctor, and in less than ten minutes she was lying on the couch in his surgery, while he was exerting all his skill to staunch the flow of blood. He had let himself in with his latchkey, and his housekeeper was still sleeping the sleep of the just.

At last success crowned his efforts, and soon afterwards the girl opened her large eyes, and, breathing a deep sigh, looked round rather bewilderedly.

She saw a small, but not uncomfortable, room, two sides of which were lined with shelves containing drugs of various kinds, while the third held books and sundry gruesome objects preserved in spirits of wine. A bright fire was burning in the grate, a copper kettle stood on the hob, singing and steaming merrily; and an arm chair, drawn close up to the hearth, was at the present moment occupied by a large tabby cat, who was purring a gentle accompaniment to the kettle.

When her eyes had taken in these objects, they fell on the fair sunburnt face of the doctor himself, who was watching her with quiet intenceness, and as she encountered his gaze the girl blushed violently, and put up her two hands to hide her burning cheeks.

The sight of him had brought back everything to her memory—for he had been right in supposing she saw him the minute before she pulled the fatal trigger.

"Don't distress yourself," he said, with a quiet friendliness that anyone might have felt to be reassuring. "You are in safety here, but you must not give way to agitation; or all my work will be in vain, and your wound will break out bleeding again."

Here eyes gleamed strangely. She half raised herself on her elbow in her eagerness.

"And then should I die?" she asked, in a trembling whisper.

He did not reply quite immediately, but knelt at her side, and took her hand in his with a gentle kindness that a brother might have shown her. She was very young—a mere child in years, though the pain and weariness in her face showed that her experiences had been manifold. A great pity for her had taken possession of him—pity for her youth, her loveliness, her evident misery—somewhat the same kind of feeling as he might have experienced if a little bird with a broken wing had taken shelter in his bosom.

"Why should you wish to die?" he said, gravely. "Life should be sweet to one as young as you."

"Sweet!" She echoed the word with a contemptuous wonder that was almost passionate. Then she shook her head. "Ah!" she said, in a different tone, "you do not know."

Again he was silent, debating within himself as to his best course of action. Ought he not to lose no time in acquainting her friends with her whereabouts?

"You remember all that has happened this evening?" he asked, presently.

"Yes—all, all! I saw you on the road just before I reached the cemetery, and then afterwards, just as I held the pistol before me. If it had not been for you," she added, bitterly, "my aim would have been truer."

There was no gratitude for his having saved her life—only an infinite regret that her mad act had not resulted as she intended it should.

"How old are you?" he asked, abruptly.

"Eighteen—just eighteen," was the indifferent answer.

"And why do you wish to have the guilt of self-murder on your soul?" he went on, sternly.

She shrank back as if he had dealt her a blow.

"Self-murder?" she repeated in a low tone,

more to herself than to him. "I never thought of it in that light."

Then she turned to him swiftly, clasping her hands together in uncontrollable eagerness.

"Don't you think Heaven would have forgiven me, if—if I had done it?"

He shook his head.

"I do not know! How can I answer such a question? I only know that it is most pitiful to see a young creature like you cherishing such impious intentions."

Her head drooped penitently, and it was some minutes before she spoke again.

"You look good, and kind, and true," she said, at length, gazing very wistfully into his face. "Perhaps, if you had spoken these words to me before, I might not—and yet—I don't know! I was so very, very miserable."

Victor noticed that she did not—as most girls would have done—burst into tears as she said these words; indeed, her whole manner, though agitated, indicated a wonderful amount of self-control. He began to think that she must have some powerful motive for her terrible resolve.

"Listen to me," he said, in his low, soothing tones. "I don't know anything about you, or what the misery may be of which you speak; but I believe you are miserable, and I offer you my help, and my friendship, and my assistance. Try and look upon me as your elder brother, and confide in me, if you think it will be in my power to help you."

It was observable that she did not at once accept his offer, neither did she rush into protestations of gratitude. She looked at him for fully three minutes, gravely, steadfastly, as if her girlish wisdom were endeavouring to probe his honesty to its very depths.

Apparently she was finally satisfied with the result of her examination, for she said, slowly:

"Yes, I will trust you, not because I think you can help me, but because I see you wish to be kind, and I owe you confidence in exchange. I liked your face when I saw you in the tent this evening."

"Then it was you who were reflected in the mirror?" he exclaimed, rather eagerly.

"Of course it was. Did you not recognise me?"

"And the woman in the long gown, with the silver embroideries—who is she?"

"My mother!" Ah! the bitterness with which these words were spoken! "The man in the outer tent, who now calls himself Professor Devigne, is my father. But Devigne is not his real name; he has only assumed it since he came to England. Until a year ago I was in a convent at Lille, where I had been placed when I was about three years old. In the interval I never saw my mother, and seldom heard from her, so that is perhaps one reason why I have found it so difficult to give her the affection that I owe her. When I was seventeen she fetched me away from the convent, and took me to Brussels, where she was living, and then—a hot glow of shame came on the girl's cheek—"I found that she and my father were keeping what was in reality a gambling-house."

She stopped a minute, and covered her face with her hands, then went on:

"I cannot bear to speak of the life I led in Brussels. It was such a horrible change from the peace and happiness of the dear old convent that at first I thought it would drive me mad. For some time I absolutely refused to appear in the salons where play went on; but, eventually, my mother forced me to do so, and I had to take my place behind the tray, and pour out coffee for her guests—as she termed them. Then—then one evening something happened that made it necessary for my parents to leave Brussels—here she broke down altogether, and trembled so violently that Victor grew frightened."

"Don't distress yourself by going into details," he said, kindly. "I can understand how revolting such an existence would be. When did you leave Brussels?"

"Not quite two months ago. I believe my parents were in debt, and came away with very little ready-money, so we had to get along as best we could. I think my father was once a professional conjurer, so he took to it again, and we have been making our way through the country, by giving the entertainments you saw this evening. Oh! the life has been horrible!—and it seemed to me that death was my only way of escaping from it. Yesterday afternoon, as we came into Greycombe, we passed the cemetery, and it looked so calm and peaceful in the afternoon sunshine that I longed to lie down, and be at rest with those other happy people, whose burdens had been taken from them. To-night, when all was quiet, I slipped out of the tent, taking my mother's revolver with me. Do you think it was very wicked of me?"

She asked the question with such a wistful pathos that Victor was conscious of a lump rising in his throat. Yes, he did think it wicked, but he could not find it in his heart to say so. Besides, he fully understood the agony the girl must have endured before such a desperate alternative presented itself. That she had spoken the truth he fully believed—and, indeed, her story was confirmed by what he himself had seen of the man and woman in the conjuring tent, as well as by her own innocence of expression.

But he was puzzled as to his next step, and he began pacing the narrow limits of the surgery in very evident perplexity.

The girl watched him the while, her thin fingers interlacing the one in the other with nervous excitement. Instinctively she knew the question he was debating with himself.

"If you betray me to my mother you will be crueler than death itself!" she exclaimed at last, in a low vehement tone. "I tell you I cannot continue to endure the life we have been leading. I do not mind its hardships—they are nothing; but my self-respect is breaking down under it. Everything that was good in me is growing bad, and bitter and sordid. If I stay with them I shall end by being like them!"

Her words decided him. He turned round and took her hand once more.

"I will not give you up to them, let the consequences be what they will! I don't know whether I am doing a wise thing. I am sure I am doing an illegal one; but, illegal or not, you shall stay here until the search for you is over, and then we will talk over the future. Now I must go up and wake my housekeeper, and confide you to her care; but first of all, tell me your name!"

"I was always called Angela at the convent," she returned—"Angela Leclercq."

"We will shorten the last name. In future you shall simply be Angela Clare!"

The housekeeper came down, very much astonished at the necessity that called for her presence.

She was a kindly, homely body, somewhat over middle age—the widow of a farmer who had seen "better days"; and, luckily for the young girl, she took an instant fancy to the poor wail whom chance—or, shall we say, Providence?—had thrown into her arms.

"Look after her!" she said, in answer to Bethell's somewhat embarrassed request—for he was uncertain how she would regard the incident—"of course I'll look after her, just as if she were a daughter of my own. And let her mother try to get her away if she dares!"

CHAPTER III.

A week later, and Greycombe had settled down to its normal condition of drowsy quietude. The tents and caravans vanished, the beating of drums and the squeaking of pipes was no longer heard, and you could have fired a gun in the market-place with very little risk of its finding a target other than the church walls.

As everything that everybody did speedily became public property, it was soon known

that Mrs. Treddowes. Dr. Bethell's house-keeper, had a niece staying with her—an invalid niece—who had been brought to Greycombe for the purpose of being under the doctor's professional care.

No one had seen her yet, but this fact was due to her delicate health, which did not permit her to leave the house.

The last part of this report was true, for Angela's wound had proved more serious than Victor anticipated, and it took all his skill to prevent inflammation from setting in, especially as, for the first few days, the girl was in a wretched state of apprehension lest her whereabouts should be discovered.

By degrees, however, her fears abated, and at the end of a fortnight she was sitting downstairs with the housekeeper, a delicate colour in her cheeks, and her eyes looking less wild and haggard than they had done since her arrival.

Nothing could have been kinder than Mrs. Treddowes proved herself. In point of fact, both her maternal and romantic instincts were aroused by the girl's loveliness, her gentle disposition, and her utter friendliness.

"You must not think of sending her away yet!" she said to Victor. "Even now she is by no means strong, and her nerves seem strung to their very highest tension. It would not be safe for her to run the slightest risk."

With this Bethell entirely agreed, and he was willing enough to let the question of Angela's departure remain in abeyance.

The housekeeper had been quite right in saying the girl's nerves were highly strung.

Victor sometimes fancied she had something on her mind more than she had revealed in her semi-confession; but he carefully refrained from hinting at this, for his object now was to make her forget, as much as possible, the sorrows of her past.

As the days went on he saw more and more of her, and he was bound to confess that her presence made a great difference to the house. The more sight of her in her black dress—one that Mrs. Treddowes had manufactured—with her deep violet eyes, and her soft wings of golden hair, was in itself delightful; and by-and-by her youth reasserted itself in spite of everything, and her laugh rang out as sweet and gay as a bird's song in spring-time.

She was like a living sunbeam, turning everything she touched to gold. At night, when Victor came home from his rounds, she would be waiting in the hall to open the door for him, ready to help him off with his coat, to fetch his slippers, and to perform a hundred little acts of graceful kindness that poor Mrs. Treddowes had never thought of.

Then in the evenings he taught her chess, and she proved herself so quick and intelligent in learning that it was soon a question which of the two could play the better!

No wonder that Angela began to fill the young doctor's thoughts, to the exclusion of patience, prudence, and everything else!

Victor Bethell was a clever man, and some people called him hard-headed, but he was no more proof against the arrows of the blind god than the rest of his sex, and before six weeks had passed away he was head over ears in love with the girl whom fate had thrown so strangely across his path.

It was one cold, damp night in the middle of November that the knowledge first came to him. He was out late, attending a patient who was seriously ill, and when he came home and let himself in with his latch-key, the clock in the hall struck eleven.

The house was very quiet. It happened that Mrs. Treddowes had a very bad headache and had gone to bed, leaving Angela to sit up, and give the doctor his supper when he came in.

But Angela, who had not expected him back quite so soon, had succumbed to the influences of the fire before which she was sitting, and had fallen asleep in the arm-chair, watched over by Victor's big retriever, who had already constituted himself the girl's protector.

So soundly asleep was she that she did not even wake when the young man stood at her side, looking down at the lovely flushed face, with its tangled curls. Her long dark lashes lay on her cheek, and Victor noticed that a few teardrops still lingered on them, as if she had been weeping in her sleep.

Her right hand clasped something at her throat. Victor bent down to see what it was.

Nothing more important than a small silver locket—valueless, so far as intrinsic worth went—which was fastened round her neck by a thin steel chain. On one side of it was a monogram; the other was of glass, and held a portrait.

But whose portrait? A sudden chill fell on the doctor's heart. For the first time the idea flashed across his mind that Angela had a lover; and he turned away, tugging rather fiercely at his moustache, for the notion was very far from being a pleasant one.

Then a burning curiosity overpowered him, and he determined to see whose picture it was—excusing himself for an action that was not altogether honourable by the reminder that he now stood somewhat in the position of guardian to Angela, and it was, therefore, his duty to find out the identity of a possible lover.

Very gently he unclasped the small pink fingers, and then he started back with a half stifled exclamation, for the portrait was nothing more nor less than a miniature drawing of himself, skilfully enough executed in pencil.

At the same moment Angela awoke, starting up in affright, her eyes wide and wild, her breast heaving, every limb trembling with excitement.

"What is the matter?" asked Victor, as in an uncontrollable access of terror she threw herself into his arms, sobbing convulsively. "There, there—Angela!—Calm yourself, darling, and tell me what has alarmed you?"

For a few seconds she did not speak, but continued to draw deep, sobbing breaths that told how great was the emotion under which she was labouring. Gradually, however, she recovered herself; and then she drew herself away, blushing shamefacedly, as if, for the first time, she remembered she was in his arms.

"I was dreaming," she said. "I had a horrible vision of something that happened at Brussels, and it seemed so real that for the moment I could not believe it was only a dream."

But she did not say what the dream was, and Victor failed to notice the omission, for his heart was beating more rapidly than it had ever beaten in his life before. Whether it was the sight of his own portrait, treasured up in secret, as it evidently had been, or whether the moment, when she lay against his breast in all the abandonment of her terror, had brought with it its own revelation cannot be said; but it is certain that the secret of his heart was shown to him, and he knew that, for the first time in his life, he loved.

"Angela!" he said, uttering her name in a low, intense tone, different to any she had ever heard him speak in.

The colour mounted higher and higher to her cheeks, but she drew slightly backward, trembling almost as much as she had trembled a few minutes ago—but, ah! under what different emotions!

Very tenderly he drew her towards him, and, in spite of her struggles, held her firm, while he told her how she had grown into his heart, until life without her would be a blank too dreary to contemplate.

"Answer me, Angela!" he exclaimed, holding her sweet, flower face a little way from him in order to see it better. "Do you care for me, and trust me enough to give your life into my keeping?"

She spoke no word, but she raised her lovely eyes to his, full of a love too deep to find expression in words, and that glance was answer sufficient for Victor Bethell.

Mrs. Treddowes was by no means so much

surprised when Dr. Bethell told her of his engagement as that gentleman thought she ought to have been—indeed, she laughed in an extremely knowing manner, and nodded her head sagely, as much as to say: "Why, I knew all about it ages ago!"

"Of course, I thought it would come to this," she observed aloud, looking openly delighted—for she revelled in the idea of a wedding, and, moreover, a son of hers was coming over from America to settle in the old country before long, and keeping his house would be even better than keeping Dr. Bethell's!

"If I might offer an opinion on the subject, I should say that the sooner you get married the better, for then Angela would have a legal protector, who would be able to save her from her mother, supposing her mother finds out her whereabouts, and tries to claim her."

In this Victor entirely agreed. Indeed, the whole circumstances of the case rendered it desirable that the marriage should take place with as little delay as possible; and, for his own part, he was most anxious to make Angela his wife, and thus be in a position to defy her enemies.

He was an orphan, and, therefore had no relations to consult in the matter, his only brother being out of England; so after asking Angela if she could make all her preparations—they were few enough, poor child!—in six days, he arranged that the wedding should take place in a week's time.

Angela acquiesced without remark, but he noticed that she had suddenly grown very quiet and grave, and seemed to have lost all the gaiety that had lately distinguished her.

Victor supposed this was not unnatural, under the circumstances; but he was a little puzzled, nevertheless, when, as the days went on, her spirits consistently declined, and more than once he surprised her with traces of tears on her face.

"Surely you are not regretting your bargain!" he said to her one afternoon, half in joke, half in earnest. "You have not discovered that you have made a mistake in accepting me for your husband?"

"I don't know—I am not sure," she returned, in a very low tone. "I have been thinking over many things lately, and—and I fear I have no right to let you marry me."

"No right! Nonsense! You don't know what you are talking of. Besides," he said, fondly, as he drew her nearer to him, "I have your promise—and a promise, you know, is a sacred thing!"

She lifted her head eagerly, and drew a quick, excited breath.

"But there are circumstances under which one is justified in breaking a promise," she said, more as a question than a remark.

He shook his head.

"I do not agree with you. A promise is a promise, and it ought to be kept, let the consequences be what they may. For my part, I never broke a promise in my life, and I hope I never shall!"

She was gazing at him very intently, and, to judge from her expression, one might have said a struggle was taking place within her.

Presently she said:—

"I have been debating within myself whether I ought not to break a vow I made to my mother before we came to England. It seems unjust to you not to do it, and yet—I pledged my most solemn word to keep her secret!"

"Then be true to your pledge!" Victor returned, almost sternly. A moment later, and he added in a gentler voice, "Remember, love, it does not concern me to know your mother's secrets. What she may have been, or have not done, need have no effect on you or on me, for it is not likely we shall have much communication with her in future. Far be it from me to under-rate the duty a daughter owes to her mother; but we must remember the mother has duties also, and those duties your mother most certainly has not fulfilled towards you. Why do you sigh, my sweet-heart? Surely you are not unhappy!"

"Not unhappy, Victor!" she whispered back, hiding her face in his breast, while her white arms stole up to wreath themselves round his sunburnt neck. "Oh, no! When I think of your love I am more happy than I can ever tell you, but sometimes the thought comes over me that I ought not to let you marry me—me, who am homeless, friendless, penniless, save, indeed, for your bounty! The sacrifice seems too great."

"Hush, darling!" he rebuked her. "Sacrifice is a word that must not be used in reference to our marriage. Remember you are the one woman in the world for me. With you is joy unspeakable; without you would be misery too bitter to think of. But come weal, or come woe, you will always be my love!"

CHAPTER IV.

The wedding-day dawned, cold, dull, and foggy—a true November morning, with a grey sky that showed no rift even so large as a man's hand.

"Never mind!" said Mrs. Treddowes, cheerfully, as she bustled about helping the bride to dress. "It might have been worse, for it might have rained, and then all our finery would have been spoiled. Not that there is much to spoil," she added, somewhat more ruefully, as she glanced from Angela's blue serge travelling dress to her own smarter silk; "but, still, one does not want even one's second-best clothes to get wet and dragged. I do wish"—plaintively—"you had taken my advice, and been married in white. A white muslin would have cost next to nothing, but it would have looked bridal, at all events—and that's more than can be said of that blue serge of yours."

"And yet," returned Angela, quietly, "I think, under the circumstances, the blue serge is the more suitable. You forget I'm a penniless dame, without even a 'long pedigree'!"

"I don't see that that has anything to do with it," grumbled the housekeeper. "I'm sure I would have given you your wedding dress, and welcome."

"You have given it me, dear Mrs. Treddowes," said the girl, affectionately, kissing her as she spoke. "And it is a very nice one. I don't wish for a better!"

"But it is not becoming. It makes you look pale."

Angela glanced into the mirror and shuddered. Yes, she did look pale—very pale, and she could not divest herself of a queer, dream-like feeling that even now the wedding would not take place.

The feeling was with her when she went downstairs and met Victor, who was smiling and radiant, in spite of the weather. It followed her as she drove with Mrs. Treddowes to the church, along the flat, straight road, with its stiffly cropped hedges and low meadows on either side.

But as she stood at the altar with Victor, tall, straight and manly at her side, some sort of confidence came back, and she gave her answers in a low, clear tone that did not betray even a trace of nervousness.

"Bravo, Angela!" said Victor, when they had left the vestry and walked down the aisle man and wife. "You behaved splendidly! You are exactly the woman for a doctor's wife. Thank Heaven, you are mine!"

She smiled brightly in his face, and then they got into the carriage together, leaving Mrs. Treddowes to follow—for nothing would induce that good lady to make a third as they went home!

"Are you really happy, Victor? Do you think you will never regret this morning's work?" the young bride asked, with a certain wistful anxiety that was half pathetic.

"I am sure of it, darling!" was his answer, while he slipped his arm round her waist, and drew her closer to him. "As for being happy

—why, there is only one thing that keeps me from being perfectly happy."

"And that?" breathlessly.

"Well, I wish my brother could have been here. It seems unnatural to be married without Cuthbert's presence. But that was impossible, as he is out in South America."

"He is your only near relation, is he not?"

"Yes. Perhaps that is one reason why we have always been so fond of each other. He is a year older than I am, and it was a fearful wrench to both of us when he left England first—two years ago—to fill a very good post in Buenos Ayres. But he could find nothing to do here, and the salary offered him there was very high, so he put sentimental considerations on one side, and went. He came over in the summer to see me, and stayed six weeks or so. I have not heard of him since he went back, but I am expecting a letter every day now. He is a careless fellow, however, and hates writing—even to me."

Victor's face lighted up into rare tenderness while he spoke of this brother of his—and, indeed, the bond that united him and Cuthbert was far deeper and stronger than usually exists between brothers.

Their parents had died when the two boys were very young, and since then they had been all in all to each other—the more so, as their natures were entirely different—Victor being quiet, earnest, strong, either to love or hate, Cuthbert having a much lighter and more adventurous temperament.

Before the newly-married couple reached home the rain that Mrs. Treddowes feared had come—not a heavy rain, but a cold, misty drizzle that gave no promise of cessation. Even Victor felt his spirits damped a little as he handed his wife into her new home.

They had determined to dispense with the conventional "honeymoon"—partly because Victor could not leave his practice, partly because Angela declared she should much prefer remaining at Greycombe.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Treddowes had insisted on preparing some sort of meal, which she dignified with the name of wedding-breakfast, and this was already laid in the little dining-room.

"I will go upstairs and take my bonnet off," Angela said; and Victor, meanwhile, went into the surgery to see whether any messages were in the letter-box, for his bride insisted that he should attend to his professional duties exactly as he did on other days.

On the threshold he paused a moment, then went forward with outstretched hand.

"Why, Arkwright! Is it you? How on earth did you get in?" he exclaimed, greeting a dark-haired, dark-eyed man of about thirty, who was standing near the fire, leaning his arm on the low mantelpiece.

Arkwright pointed to the window.

"Got in through there, as I failed to make anyone hear when I knocked at the door. I saw there was smoke coming from the chimneys, so I judged it would not be long before you returned. I say, old fellow, have you got such a thing as a brandy-and-soda about? I should be glad of one, if you have."

"You look as if you wanted it!" observed Victor, returning from the next room with the required beverage. "Why, what on earth have you been doing with yourself? You are perfectly ghastly!"

"I have been ill—had about as narrow a shave as ever a man had, and I haven't recovered yet. Added to that, I have had a long journey—crossed the Channel last night, and came straight here from London this morning."

"What did you do that for?" was on the tip of Victor's tongue, but he checked himself. Not because the speech savoured of inhospitality, but because it suddenly occurred to him that Arkwright must have some strong motive for his hasty journey, and that that motive was connected with himself.

Robert Arkwright was an artist, who had

been at school with him and his brother. He had stayed with Victor for a few days since he settled in Greycombe; but he was Cuthbert's rather than Victor's friend, and when Cuthbert went away, Arkwright had gone with him as far as Antwerp to see him off.

Victor watched him narrowly while he drank the soda-and-brandy, and as he set the glass down he said, abruptly:

"You bring me bad news?"

The elder man shivered, as if a breath of cold air had struck him.

"Yes," he answered, slowly, after a minute's pause, "I'm afraid I do. How did you guess it?"

Victor grimly pointed to the little square of looking-glass above the chimney-piece.

"If you had looked at your own reflection you wouldn't have asked me that question."

And, indeed, Arkwright's face was not only deathly white, but the muscles twitched nervously, as if their owner had lost all control over them.

For a few seconds there was silence between the two men—a silence so intense that the faint beating of the rainy drizzle on the window panes was distinctly audible, and the ticking of the clock sounded preternaturally loud.

A horrible apprehension—nameless, but none the less powerful because it was not yet put into shape—had seized on Victor. In some mysterious way or other Arkwright had learned his projected marriage, and his ill-news had to do with Angela!

"What have you got to tell me of my wife?" he asked, hoarsely. Then, with a sudden fierceness, "Nothing shall part me from her! Do you hear? Nothing! nothing!"

"Your wife!" repeated Arkwright, in unfeigned surprise. "I did not know you had one!"

His astonishment was so evident that it was clear he was speaking the truth. Victor's heart gave a great bound of relief.

"Thank heaven for that!" he murmured to himself. "I can bear anything else." Aloud he said, with a laugh that hardly sounded joyous:

"Why, man, this is my wedding-day! I have just returned home from church with my bride!"

Arkwright fell back a pace, growing, if possible, paler than before.

"Your wedding day! Good heavens, what a fatality!" He turned round and went to the window, where he remained for a few minutes, drumming abstractedly on the glass, his back to Bethell. Presently he came back to his former place, with a very poor attempt at a cheerful expression on his features. "Look here, old fellow! I'm awfully sorry I turned up on such an occasion—it's most unfortunate. If I'd had any idea that you were on the point of being married I would have kept out of the way, and, as it is, the best thing I can do is to clear out at once. I'll see you later on. I'll write to you, in fact. I'll —"

He was making his way rapidly to the door, talking hastily and incoherently, doing his best to disguise his agitation, and succeeding remarkably bad in the intention.

Victor intercepted him, laying a heavy hand on his shoulder, which the other was powerless to shake off.

"You will do nothing of the sort. I confess I would rather you had postponed your visit for another week, but now you are here you will tell me your object in coming. Any certainty is better than suspense."

He meant what he said, and the other saw it.

Arkwright looked helplessly around, as if to make sure all chances of escape were cut off; then he said, desperately:—

"How long is it since you heard from Cuthbert?"

Victor's face changed. No need to tell him whom the bad news concerned now!

"I have not heard from him at all since he left," he replied, in a low, stern voice. "But

you have, and it is of him you have come to speak! What is it? Out with it, for Heaven's sake. Don't keep me on tenter-hooks any longer! Cuthbert is ill?"

"Yes, very ill. So ill that," Arkwright's voice faltered, and he bit his lip to conceal its trembling. "In point of fact, he is dead!"

"Dead!" muttered Victor, in a dazed voice, as if he did not understand. "Dead! How did he die?"

"He was murdered—yes, foully murdered!" was Arkwright's answer, given in tones that rang out with unsuspected clearness. Now that the worst was over he recovered his self-possession. And it is for you and me, Victor, to bring his murderers to justice!"

CHAPTER V.

Victor Bethell had made no idle boast when he told Angela he had never broken a promise. He might have added, also, that he had never shirked a duty; and when the first outburst of grief for his brother's fate had spent itself, his one idea was to avenge it—not in the spirit of revenge, but simply as a sacred duty.

"Now tell me how it happened," he said, in a low and sternly-repressed tone, while he stood facing Arkwright, with his back to the door that communicated with the sitting-room, and his head supported by his elbow on the mantelpiece.

"I will tell you all I know. Some of the details you will fill in for yourself. As you are aware, I accompanied Cuthbert to Belgium, with the intention of seeing him off at Antwerp; but as we had some time to spare before the ship sailed, we put up at an hotel in Brussels, and, unfortunately, fell in with an old friend of mine, who, one evening, took us to a place called the Maison Verte, that I may describe as a private gambling-house. In justice to myself I must tell you that I strongly persuaded Cuthbert not to go there again, but my persuasions were of no avail. It was not that he cared so much for the cards or roulette tables; but he was fascinated with a girl when he met there—a very beautiful girl I must confess she was—and night after night he spent at the place, quite content to let himself be swindled out of his money if only he got a chance of speaking to mademoiselle. For my own part, I grew to hate the girl when I saw the influence she was beginning to obtain over him, and I took no pains to disguise from either of them the fact that I believed her to be a consummate coquette.

"Then I had to go to Paris in a great hurry to see an American millionaire, from whom I had a commission to paint a picture, and before I had been there many days I sickened with typhoid. For nearly two weary months I lay oscillating between life and death—better one week, having relapses the next; and when I was able to sit up and take an interest in things about me, the first thing that struck me was the absence of news from Cuthbert. He knew my address, and had promised to write to me, even when he supposed I should be absent only a few days; therefore it seemed doubly strange that he should not have done so when I failed to return at the specified time.

"Thinking it possible that he, too, might have been ill, I wrote to the landlord of the hotel where he had been staying, asking when he had left. Judge of my surprise on receiving an answer to the effect that Mr. Bethell had gone out one evening, some three days after my own departure, and had never returned. His luggage was still at the hotel. Then I felt rather alarmed, and sent for a list of the passengers that had sailed in the *Golden Butterfly*, the vessel for which he had taken his passage, and which, by this time, must have nearly arrived at her destination. The list was forwarded, but Cuthbert's name was not down."

Arkwright paused a moment to take breath—for he had spoken very rapidly, being evi-

dently anxious to get his recital over as quickly as possible. Victor never once changed his position, but stood with his hand shading his eyes, and a strange, blind fear at his heart. The shadow of a paralysing terror was upon him—looming before him like some great shapeless mountain, as yet but dimly seen.

"First of all, I thought of writing to you," Arkwright proceeded, "but afterwards I changed my mind, and decided to go to Brussels myself, and see if I could not elucidate the mystery. Accordingly I returned to the hotel, but there was nothing to discover there, so I proceeded to the Maison Verte—which I found shut up and empty.

"On inquiry, it turned out that its former occupants had deserted it in a great hurry, and very much in debt, without leaving a clue to their whereabouts. On hearing this I went to the police, and they instituted a search. In the cellar they found the dead body of a man, with a wound in his breast—and that man was Cuthbert."

Victor's head sank a little lower, and he drew a quick breath. When he spoke again his voice had a curiously hollow ring in it.

"And the name of these people at the Maison Verte?"

"They called themselves Devigne—but it is ten chances to one if that was their real name. Still, it won't be very difficult to trace them, for I have already learned that they crossed the Channel, and in all probability they are in England at the present moment. But wherever they may be," added Arkwright, with a sudden, savage passion, "I will track them out, and bring them to justice! Whatever articles of value Cuthbert had about him were gone, so it may be for the sake of them his life was taken. Still, whoever struck the blow, the real murderess was the girl who lured him on to his fate; but for her he would never have crossed the accursed threshold a second time!"

"You have not told me this girl's name?" said Victor, still with the same ominous quiet.

"Angela—Mademoiselle Angela, they called her."

Victor laughed—a loud, mocking laugh that rang out with the spurious ghastly mirth of a maniac. His eyes were blazing fiercely, but his face was white to the very lips.

"Angela, my wife, Angela, the murderess of my brother!" he cried out. "Why it sounds like a Greek tragedy, or a joke!"

He threw out his arms with a wild gesture, that expressed the very abandonment of despair, and then his head sunk on his hands, and great sobs of agony burst from his bosom—an agony so intense that Arkwright turned away, not understanding, indeed, but thoroughly unmanned at the sight of such despair.

There was a faint cry from the door leading into the sitting-room, and both men looked up simultaneously. White and rigid, as if she were carved in stone, Angela stood on the threshold—the very embodiment of a misery too great even to find relief in words.

"You!" cried Arkwright, after a pause of intense surprise. "You—here!"

She took no notice of him, though the sound of his voice seemed to break the spell that had held her silent. With one bound she was at her husband's side, but he put out his arm, and kept her back.

"Wait a minute," he said, hoarsely. "Have you heard what this man"—pointing to Arkwright—"has been telling me?"

She bowed her head in assent. In fact, she had heard nearly every word, for she had been arrested on the threshold of the surgery, just as she was coming in, by Arkwright's voice.

"Is it true that my brother Cuthbert was murdered at your parents' house at Brussels?" went on Victor, inexorably, his wild eyes never once leaving her face.

A shudder shook her from head to foot. "Heaven help me—it is true!" she murmured, in a voice that would not have been

audible to ears less strained than those she addressed.

Paler than he was, it was impossible for Victor to become, but the hand that was outstretched to keep her from him fell limp and helpless at his side, and he stepped back a pace, as though to increase the distance between them.

She noticed the movement, and the misery in her eyes grew deeper.

"Hear me, Victor!" she cried, clasping her slim white hands together in passionate appeal. "I was ignorant of the fact that it was your brother—I never heard him called anything but 'Bertie.' If I had known, I would have gone from your hearth the moment consciousness came to me. Oh, Victor—Victor! don't look at me like that! It is worse than death itself!"

"Immeasurably worse," responded Bethell, with a groan. "Would to Heaven I had died before I had ever seen you!"

Once more his bowed head was hidden by his arms, and when he raised it again his wife was gone.

The hours of that wretched day dragged themselves slowly on; but surely such a wedding-day had never been spent before! Mrs. Treddowes, conscious that some great calamity had fallen upon the house, cleared away the untouched repast, with its pitiful little attempt at bridal decoration, its white flowers and maidenhair ferns tied with bows of satin ribbon, and then wandered restlessly about, wondering when Angela would return.

Victor still remained in the surgery, but when evening came Roger Arkwright took his departure, acknowledging that his plans for bringing Cuthbert Bethell's murderess to justice were futile now, and wondering if fate had ever woven such a tragedy as this before.

The surgery fire had long ago burnt itself out to a mass of grey cinders, the room was cold and chill, and full of dim November shadows. Outside, the rain still beat against the windows, and the wind sobbed mournfully.

Mrs. Treddowes, entering the surgery with a lighted taper in her hand, found Victor sitting in an armchair in front of the empty fireplace, his elbows on his knees, and his hands supporting his face. Was it the shadows of the taper, or was his face really as grey and ghastly as it looked?

"Come into the sitting-room, Doctor Bethell," said the housekeeper, kindly. "You will be starved sitting here in the cold."

He took no notice of the remark—seemed, indeed, as if he did not hear it. Mrs. Treddowes occupied herself in lighting the lamp, and drawing the curtains over the rain-splashed window, and then fetched in a bundle of sticks, and rekindled the fire.

"Angela has not come home yet," she said, rather hesitatingly, and conscious that she was treading on dangerous ground. "I hope she will be here soon, for it is a dreadful night for her to be out."

Victor raised his head at the sound of his wife's name, but he made no observation, and Mrs. Treddowes then brought in a cup of tea, which she persuaded him to drink.

And so the night wore on. Seven—eight—nine o'clock struck from the old timepiece in the hall, but nothing else broke the silence that had fallen on the house. As the last stroke of nine died away Mrs. Treddowes again entered the surgery.

"Are you not going to do anything in the matter of your wife's absence?" she exclaimed, somewhat angrily.

"What can I do?" asked Victor, in dull tones of absolute apathy. "She can never come back here again—at least, so long as I am here. The same roof can never shelter us two." He was silent for a few minutes, then he said abruptly,—

"Has she got any money with her?" "Yes, I gave her a purse this morning for a wedding present, and there was a five-pound note in it," responded Mrs. Treddowes, futilely wiping away her tears, as she thought

of the bright smile and grateful thanks with which the fair young bride had received her gift.

Victor seemed satisfied with the answer, and mentioned to his housekeeper to leave him but as she reached the door he made a signal for her to stop.

"Mrs. Treddowes," he said, still in the same colourless tones, "in future I wish things to go on precisely as they did before—as they did when you and I were alone. If anyone asks you where your supposed niece is, tell them she has left, never to return."

And this was all the explanation he vouchsafed, either then or afterwards. The next day he went about his practice as usual; and though his patients noticed a new gravity on his face and a deeper sternness in his eyes, there was nothing else to show them that for him "the wine of life was drawn!"

CHAPTER VI.

It is seven months later—a lovely June day, with a sky as blue as sapphire, and a soft air, laden with a thousand soft odours, blowing over the waving fields of green corn.

People in London are crying out at the hot asphalt and the close streets, but down here in Warwickshire the leaves of the elms are gently swaying in the breeze, and a branch of roses that has broken loose from its fastenings is waving across the casement window of a small Gothic cottage standing all by itself in the midst of a trim lawn and garden, and surrounded by a lavish plenteousness of sweet, old-fashioned—flowers—stocks, carnations, sweet Williams; to say nothing of roses, which are to be found in all shades and sizes.

In front of the diamond-paned casement stands a girl, dressed in a plain black gown, and with her golden hair twisted firmly round her head—that is to say, as firmly as its nature will allow, for it is hair that is given to waving into tiny curls and love-locks, and not all the hairpins in the world could prevent one or two escaping from the yellow coils.

There was a curious contradiction in the face of this girl. The roundness and exquisite bloom of extreme youth were on the features, while the expression was so intensely sad as to bespeak an experience far in advance of her years.

As she looked out across the level velvet of the lawn some painful memory seemed to strike her, for a heavy tear-drop fell on her sily-clasped hands, and she breathed a deep sigh.

"Why, Annie!" said a gentle old voice behind her, while a withered, but still shapely hand was laid on her shoulder. "What ails you, my child? I thought you promised me to do your best to forget all that is sorrowful in your past?"

The speaker was an old lady of over sixty—one of those women who make old age beautiful. Her face was still plump and fair, though the bands of hair enfaming it were silver white; and her blue eyes looked sweet and gentle, but at the same time keen and observant.

Angela—for it was she—turned round hastily, and smiled—rather a pale and shadowy smile it was.

"And so I have done my best, dear Mrs. Sedley, and so I will do my best; but you know oblivion will not come because we call it; and sometimes, though I strive my utmost to drive them away, thoughts of old days will come back to me."

Mrs. Sedley looked at her keenly. The sweet face seemed tired and pale, and there was an expression about the eyes betokening want of rest.

"My dear, you don't look well," she said, abruptly. "What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing, except dreaming painful dreams, and over them, as you know, we have no control."

The old lady was silent for a few minutes, then she took the young girl's hand affectionately between her own.

"I have never worried you with questions, Anne, concerning what happened in the days before I knew you," she said, gravely. "When you came down here to be my nurse and companion you made it a condition that the secrets of your past should be respected, and respected they have been. Your sweet face told me I might trust you; but sometimes it has occurred to me that if you would only confide in me I might be able to help you. Recollect, you are so young, and I, who am old enough to be your grandmother, might see a way out of your troubles that is invisible to you."

The girl shook her head, her lips quivered. "It could not be, Mrs. Sedley. A terrible crime lies between me and happiness, and nothing—nothing can bridge it over. Indeed," she cried, impulsively, while she carried the old lady's hand to her lips. "I am as near happiness here with you as I could be anywhere. You are goodness itself, and when I can drown thought I am at rest!"

The old lady smiled incredulously. Experience had taught her that to old age alone "rest" and "happiness" are synonymous terms.

"Well—well! It must be as you wish, but I can't see you moping about the place like this. Go upstairs, and put your hat on, and we will go for a walk under the trees in Dene Park. There is nothing like fresh air for an attack of the megrims."

They made a pretty picture—the old woman and the young one—as they walked arm-in-arm through the wicket-gate, and out into the highroad.

Angela had been favoured by Fortune when it sent her to Mrs. Sedley—who, having no children of her own, had grown to regard her companion in the light of one.

Perhaps, however, it will be as well to give a few words of explanation as to how our heroine found herself at the pretty, rose-wreathed house that was so appropriately called "Rose Cottage."

On leaving Greycombe that wretched November day she had made her way in a half-dazed condition to the station, and had there taken a third-class ticket to London. She had no definite plan of action, being, indeed, too utterly broken down to think of anything save the necessity of quitting Greycombe—of riding her husband of a presence that had grown suddenly hateful to him.

Not that she loved him one iota the less. There was nothing in his conduct that she could blame; and her heart beat with as passionate an affection now as when he had stood at the altar at her side, and they had plighted their troth. But the cruel Fate that had divided them was remorseless, and both had to bow before it.

When she arrived in London she asked one of the railway porters if he could recommend her to some quiet, inexpensive lodgings, and the man did so.

In the same house a lady was staying who was ill with diphtheria, and whose nurse unfortunately took the complaint.

Angela, hearing through the landlady of this, offered to take the nurse's place; and her offer being accepted, she attended to the patient with a care and skill that announced her as a born nurse.

The doctor attending the lady took a great fancy to the sweet-faced girl, who seemed so lonely and friendless in the great city, and advised her to adopt nursing as a profession, telling her he would do his best to recommend her amongst his patients.

Shortly after this he asked her if she would like to go down to Warwickshire to attend on an elderly cousin of his, who was suffering from rheumatic fever, and it was in this way that Angela came to Mrs. Sedley's; for after she had nursed the old lady back to health the latter asked her to stay on—at least, for the summer—in the capacity of companion.

After leaving the highroad the two turned in at a little gate, of which Mrs. Sedley had the key, and found themselves in an avenue of elms leading up to a somewhat imposing-looking edifice of Elizabethan style, which was

evidently uninhabited. The shutters of the lower windows were all closed, while the blinds of the upper ones were drawn down, thus giving the house a very sombre appearance on this bright June day.

"What a pity there is no one living here!" exclaimed Angela, involuntarily.

"Yes; the place will soon go to rack and ruin if it is not looked after," responded Mrs. Sedley. "It is four years now since anyone lived in it. The last owner and his son preferred living abroad in consequence of the younger man's health."

"He died of consumption, did he not?" inquired Angela, who, however, had heard the story before.

"Yes, poor fellow; and the very week afterwards his brother, who was in India, died of jungle fever. This double loss so affected the old man that he never got over it. And now the solicitors are advertising for the heir-at-law—and they seem to have some difficulty in finding him."

They had by this time reached a point in the avenue where it branched off at right angles, and round the corner they were suddenly confronted by two people—a gentleman and a lady. The former was a small, clean-shaven, brisk-looking man of five-and-thirty, the latter a woman of forty, perhaps, tall, and of stately presence, and very fashionably dressed.

She came to a pause as she saw Angela, and a strange gleam shot into her dark eyes; but she was not the kind of woman to be taken at a disadvantage, and a minute later she had passed on, pulling her veil over her face—perhaps with the object of hiding her pallor from her companion.

This incident had not been lost on Mrs. Sedley, whose eyes, although old, were by no means lacking in penetration. She looked at Angela, and was not specially surprised when she saw the girl had become deadly white—even her lips had blanched.

"My dear, are you going to faint?" she asked in alarm, tightening her grasp on the young girl's arm.

"No," was the almost inaudible response. "Let us sit down here for a few minutes. I shall be all right directly."

She indicated the fallen trunk of a tree, and they both rested on it. After a while the colour came back to Angela's cheeks, but she still seemed very discomposed.

"You recognised that lady who passed?" asked Mrs. Sedley, who had not outlived Mother Eve's failing.

"Yes."

"And she recognised you?"

"Yes—I think so."

"I am sure of it," returned the old lady, with conviction. "The person with her was a Mr. Sturges. He is the junior member of the firm of London solicitors employed by the last owner of this place, Mr. Cleveland. I suppose he is down here on business connected with the estate. I wonder if the lady has anything to do with it as well?"

That was just what Angela was wondering—for it is needless to say the lady referred to was none other than her mother. But what brought Mrs.—or Madame Leclercq, as she preferred calling herself—down here with this lawyer? Evidently fortune had smiled on her lately, to judge by her rich attire. And why had she passed her daughter without acknowledging her?

That she need expect no manifestations of maternal affection from Madame Leclercq experience had already taught Angela; but that after a separation of eight months she should not even stop to speak to her was a mystery the girl could not solve.

Mrs. Sedley was watching her in puzzled wonderment. Mysteries may be all very well, while they are confined to three-volume novels, but when they invade our own domestic circle they are decidedly a nuisance; and although the old lady had honestly tried to keep her promise of not inquiring into those circumstances that had thrown Angela friend-

less on the world, it was, nevertheless, at a severe sacrifice to her curiosity.

"We had better go home," she said, rather shortly; and accordingly to Rose Cottage they returned—Mrs. Sedley going at once to her room to lie down, for the heat had fatigued her.

Angela was glad to find herself alone, and walked up and down the garden in front of the house, her head bent, and her hands clasped behind her back.

"Angela!"

She started and looked up. Before her stood Madame Leclercq—alone.

"So!" exclaimed the latter, slowly eyeing her from head to foot. "I have found you at last—ungrateful girl that you are! Why did you try your best to break my heart by running away from me as you did?"

For a moment surprise kept Angela silent. Her mother's tone was one of reproachful affection—wounded love; there was little real anger in it.

"You may well be silent," continued Madame Leclercq, coming a step nearer, and laying her hand on the girl's shoulder. "If you knew the agonies I have suffered since you left, your remorse would, indeed, be keen. I have searched everywhere for you—night and day, day and night. There has never been a moment in the twenty-four hours when you have not been in my thoughts!"

Angela smiled a little scornfully, and drew back, so as to slip the delicately gloved hand from her shoulder.

"I imagined you would search for me," she returned deliberately, "but I certainly never dreamed that your anxiety as to my fate would be so overpowering."

"Unkind girl!" murmured her mother, taking out a lace-edged handkerchief, strongly redolent of patchouli, "but you always misunderstood me. Everything I did you misconstrued. Besides," she added, sinking her voice, "if I ever did behave severely to you, it was simply because I was under the thumb of your father. That man was a fiend." Her face grew white again under its rouge, and her eyes gleamed hatefully. "And he made his will my law. Thank heaven, I am rid of him at last!"

"Where is he, then?" breathed Angela, who was evidently painfully agitated at the interview.

"At the bottom of the sea, so I most devoutly hope!" was his wife's fervent rejoinder. "Any how, he sailed for Melbourne, and I have heard since that the ship was wrecked. So, Angela, now that he is out of the way, you will come back to me, and we will be happy together. The past shall be forgotten, and we will begin a new life together. Is it not so, my child?"

Her voice softened into well-simulated tenderness as she concluded, but it had no visible effect on Angela. Unhappily her experience of her mother was such that she doubted if she could be genuine.

"Mother," she said very sadly, "I am afraid that, even if my father is absent, you and I are not suited to live together."

"Wait a minute, my dear! Before you go any farther let me enlighten you on one point. Auguste Leclercq was not your father. Your own father died years ago—when you were only three years old. Leclercq is my second husband—worse luck!"

Angela felt as if a great weight had suddenly been lifted off her heart. Thank heaven that she owed neither life nor duty to a man whose character was so vile that even when she believed herself to be his daughter she had utterly scorned and despised him.

"Why did you not tell me this before?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Why have you let me remain in ignorance all these years?"

Madame Leclercq showed no sign of confusion.

"Because it was his wish. He thought you would be of considerable help to him in his plans, and his power over you would be greater if you imagined yourself to be his daughter.

He quickly discovered your obstinacy, and he found that the only hold he had of you was in the fact of his supposed parentage. But we need not talk of that, Angela. All those wretched days are over, and a new life is dawning for us. I will not ask you how you came here. You shall tell me everything by-and-by; and I also shall have various items of news to acquaint you with. But will you go now and tell your friends—whoever they may be—that your mother has come for you, and that you are returning to London with her by the evening mail?"

Madame Leclercq said this in quite a matter-of-fact tone, as if obedience were a foregone conclusion; and for a minute the old spell of her authority came over Angela, and she felt as she used to feel in bygone days when she had striven with all her might to "honour her father and mother," even while all her nature revolted against the strain laid upon it.

Her hand went up to her neck—it was a trick of hers when excited—and there, underneath her dress, it touched a small gold ring which she always wore hidden from sight.

There was magic in the contact, and her mother, who was watching her closely, saw her face harden.

"No," she said, decidedly, "I cannot go back with you. Heaven knows what suffering I endured before I could make up my mind to run away from you at Greystone; but I did make it up, and I cannot run the risk again. It is terrible to me to have to say these things to you, but I cannot help myself!"

Into Madame Leclercq's eyes there shot a gleam of baffled fury, but she subdued her rising temper, thinking of the high stake for which she was playing, and reflecting that there would be plenty of time for being "level" with Mademoiselle later on.

"Nonsense, Angela!" she said, with a forced laugh. "I confess that in the old days things were not quite as they should have been, but you must remember we were very poor, child; and beggars can't be choosers. All that is altered now. I shall take you back to wealth, luxury, everything that your heart can desire—and no more card-playing, either!"

"And where does all this wealth come from?" asked Angela, her determination not shaken, although her curiosity was roused.

But Madame Leclercq shook her head playfully.

"You shall learn in due time—not now! This much I can tell you. It is honestly come by. So now go and put your mantle on. I have not much time to spare!"

But Angela was obdurate; and although her mother alternately flattered, cajoled, and reproached, her resolve was still unalterable.

Madame Leclercq's brow grew darker and darker. She was not the sort of woman to brook opposition; and though she strove very hard to control herself there was a very ugly look on her handsome feature, as she bent suddenly forward, and clutched Angela's shoulder so fiercely, that the next day a cruel blue mark showed on the delicate flesh.

"You say you won't come! Well, I say you shall! Remember you are my daughter. You are under age, and that being so my authority over you is paramount. I insist on your accompanying me to London, and if you still refuse I will not hesitate to call in legal help to enforce my power. Do you hear?"

Angela faced her with perfect calmness, though a bright crimson spot flamed redly in either cheek.

"You are my mother; I am under age; and a mother's authority over a minor is upheld by the law," she repeated. "Yes, you are quite right; but I would remind you that there is one authority to which even a mother must bow!"

"And that?" gasped Madame Leclercq, leaning forward in her eagerness, while in her black eyes still glittered that baleful light.

"A husband's!" and as she spoke Angela held up her left hand, on whose third finger she had slipped her wedding-ring.

CHAPTER VII.

Madame Leclercq was checkmated. It did not for a moment occur to her to doubt the girl's assertion, for she knew Angela to be perfectly incapable of telling a lie, even where it would tend to her own advantage.

She remained for a few moments gazing at the girl in a passion too great for words; then she turned round, and walked down to the gate and back in order to gain time to consider the position.

"Who is your husband?" she demanded, harshly and imperiously. "I have a right, and I demand to know!"

Poor Angela was shaken to the inmost fibre of her being. Her face was so pitifully white and quivering that even her mother guessed some terrible tragedy must be connected with her marriage.

"Is your husband here?" Madame asked, in a rather low voice, pointing to the cottage.

Angela shook her head.

"No. I left him the day we were married. It was no fault of his," she added, hastily, lest even in thought Victor should be blamed. "He is everything that is good and kind and noble! but—we parted!"

"And your reason for parting?"

"That is my secret!" returned the girl, firmly, "and I shall guard it! If I were to tell it you, it would only bring misery upon you, and so it is better buried in oblivion! Do not ask me any more questions!" she cried out, in a sudden burst of anguish. "I cannot endure them! Even now I feel exhausted!"

"You look it," grimly responded her mother, who, however, thought fit to drop the subject. "Well, marriage or no marriage, you had much better come back with me. I had intended giving you a pleasant surprise as soon as you got to London, but your obstinacy won't give me the chance of doing it. Do you wonder what brought me down here to-day?" she continued, abruptly.

"I did wonder," wearily answered the girl.

"Well, it had to do with a large fortune that I believe will eventually be mine—ours, I should say—but for your undutiful behaviour! I came to look over the property, which is finer than even my dreams pictured! Think, Angela, what a position yours may be as my heiress! Unlimited money, horses, carriages, jewels, fine dresses to your heart's desire!" She was watching the lovely face very intently as she spoke, but no change came over it. "You don't seem to care for these things!" she concluded, bitterly.

"No," Angela replied, indifferently. "Twelve months ago they would have represented all sorts of delights to me; but now my one desire is to be quiet, and at peace. I have grown to hate the sight of strangers—the sound of their voices, even! If I were to leave this place—where, at least, I have the satisfaction of thinking I am of use—I should retire into a convent!"

Madame Leclercq shrugged her shoulders. What was the use of talking to a girl in this unnatural frame of mind? She must leave her—at least, for the present—and trust to time for bringing her to her senses.

"Well," she said, finally, "then, as you refuse to come with me, I must go, but before I do promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"That you won't quit this place without communicating with me."

Angela readily gave the required promise, upon which Madame Leclercq took leave. As she got to the gate she turned back, and took a card from her pocket.

"You had better keep this. It has my address upon it, and perhaps you may write me word that you have changed your mind," she observed, cynically, as she swung the gate after her, and walked with quick, firm footsteps down the dusty high road towards the village, where the solicitor, Mr. Sturges, and

the carriage that was to convey her to the railway station, were in waiting for her.

But she did not look pleased. Angela's refusal meant much more to her than the loss of the girl's love and companionship. It had a distinct monetary influence on her future, and she could not congratulate herself on the prospect.

The solicitor wondered what had come over his companion, for she carefully refrained from mentioning to him her object in visiting Rose Cottage; and it was in order to keep from him the secret of Angela's identity that she had not openly recognised the girl when she saw her first in the avenue.

It had, however, been easy enough to get rid of Mr. Sturges for a while, and discover her daughter's whereabouts afterwards, without his having the least suspicion of her proceedings; but he was shrewd enough to guess now that something of a serious import must have happened during the afternoon to account for the deep frown that made such an upright crease on her still handsome brow.

While they were in a first-class compartment, on their way to London, Madame Leclercq roused herself from a deep reverie into which she had fallen by saying:—

"Is there any way of finding out where and when a certain marriage took place if one is provided with the name of the bride?"

"Can you fix the date of the marriage?" asked the solicitor, answering her question by another.

"Yes. It took place within the last six or seven months."

"Then I think I can ascertain it for you without much difficulty."

It was growing dusk—at least, as dusk as it ever is at midsummer—and Victor Bethell was sitting in his surgery in front of the window where a few pots of mignonette were in bloom.

He had been smoking, but his pipe had gone out, and he had forgotten to relight it. A book lay on his lap unopened. He had sat down with the determination to read up some abstruse medical subject, but other thoughts had come and driven away all desire for reading, or smoking, or anything else.

Dr. Bethell looked a prematurely aged and sorrow-stricken man. Young as he was, there were deep lines in his face, and threads of grey in his hair, while in his eye was a hopelessness that never lightened.

His love for Angela had been the one great absorbing passion of his life, and not until he had lost her did he fully estimate its depth. He was thinking of her now, wondering where she was, filled with an intense desire to see her once more—only to see her, to hear the sound of her voice!

He had not been altogether without news of her since she left. About a month after her departure, the thought of all the ills that might happen to her, alone and unprotected as she was, had grown too agonising to be borne, and he had advertised in the columns of a daily paper, imploring her to let him know she was safe and well.

Through the same medium her answer came back, and it partially allayed his fears, for it assured him on both points. Since then he had heard nothing from her; nor, indeed, did he expect to hear from her again.

He got up suddenly, and began pacing up and down, while pipe and book fell unheeded on the floor. Once he paused, and looked grimly at a shelf on which were various close-stoppered bottles, all labelled "Poison."

"It would be an easy way out of it all," he muttered, with a deep sigh, "only it is a coward's device. No, I have not come to that yet!"

His musings were interrupted in a most unexpected manner by the door being thrown open, and Mrs. Treddowes announcing, rather aggressively,—

"A lady, who says she must see you, sir."

The lady advanced—a tall, stately woman,

whose face, seen even in that dim light, seemed strangely familiar to Victor, although he could not for the moment recall to his memory who she was.

"Excuse me, madam. I will light the gas," he said, bowing courteously, and as soon as the light fell up them each uttered an exclamation of recognition—Victor seeing in his visitor the mother of his wife, and she recognising the young man whose fortune she had pretended to tell at Greycombe Fair last autumn.

Instantly his face grew sterner, and he neither seated himself nor offered a chair to his visitor.

"To what may I attribute the honour of this visit, madam?" he asked, coldly.

"To a very natural interest in the welfare of my daughter," she returned, with perfect self-possession.

"Your interest in your daughter's welfare comes rather late in the day?" he observed, unable to repress the sneer.

"At any rate, you will acknowledge it is not an unworthy one. You, Dr. Bethell, are my daughter's husband?"

"Yes—so far as the law goes."

"And you parted from her on your wedding-day?"

Victor's face grew black. But for the fact that she was a woman his visitor would have exacted scant courtesy from him.

"I do not see any necessity to discuss the matter. It is a very painful one, and the less said the better."

"Wait a minute," was the quiet response, while Madame Leclercq leaned on the back of an arm-chair and confronted him with perfect *savoir faire*. "It seems to me I have a right to know some details of a matter that concerns me so nearly as my daughter's marriage. It is true she ran away from me, and I acknowledge that she was treated very badly—but that was her stepfather's fault, and not mine; and now that he is dead, it is my most earnest wish to become reconciled to Angela; and it is because I think it possible you may help me that I am here to-night."

"Have you seen her, then?" demanded the young man, in a tone that at once assured his guest it was from no lack of affection he had allowed his wife to go.

"Yes. I saw her the day before yesterday. I cannot say she looked either well or happy."

Victor groaned, and shaded his face with his hand. He did not speak for a few minutes, then he turned fiercely on his companion.

"Are you come to gloat over the misery you have wrought—you and your accursed husband?"

Madame Leclercq drew back in astonishment—genuine astonishment—as Victor could not fail to see. It will be remembered that neither she nor Angela were aware of poor Cuthbert Bethell's real name; therefore, she had no idea of the connection between him and Victor.

She had come down to Greycombe with the intention of fathoming the mystery concerning Angela's marriage, and—if possible—coming to terms with her husband, but at the present moment her plans looked far from promising.

"I don't understand you," she said, with dignity. "How is it possible that either I or my husband can have had anything to do with your parting from your wife?"

Then Victor told her—not staying to measure his language, or calculate the effects of his words. With a scorn so deep, fury so scathing that she absolutely writhed under it, he accused her of the murder of his brother; and she, losing the self-control that had hitherto distinguished her, shrank back like some animal caught in a lair, and expecting every moment its death-blow. Her face grew ghastly, her eyes wide and wild; she put up her hands, as if to ward off his terrible denunciations.

"Hush—oh, hush!" she cried out at last, her voice breaking into a low moan. "I am at your mercy; let that reason induce you to spare me!"

He laughed contemptuously.

"You need not fear I shall openly denounce you. Consideration for Angela will keep me silent."

"And Angela told you this?" said the woman, slowly gathering more encouragement, and smoothing back her hair, but with trembling fingers.

"No, her lips were sealed until my brother's friend, Roger Arkwright, repeated the whole wretched story to me, and even then she told me nothing. She had no opportunity for doing so, in fact, for she left me—for ever!"

Unconsciously to himself, Victor spoke the two last words with a hopeless pathos; and hard-hearted as was the woman whom he addressed, greedy, world-worn, scoffing, there must have been some shred of gentler womanhood left in her breast, for her eyes softened wonderfully.

"Brave Angela!" she murmured, more to herself than him. "In spite of everything she kept her promise."

"What promise?"

"One she made to me before she left Brussels—one which I am tempted to tell you of," replied Madame Leclercq, after hastily revolving the situation in her mind. It was clear to her that she was not likely to get anything out of either husband or wife by means of threats or persuasions; therefore her best plan, after all, would be to found her claim on their gratitude. For once honesty would be the best policy, and Madame resolved to tell the truth. "But before I begin my confession you must swear to hold it sacred."

"I shall make you no promise," was the uncompromising reply. "But at the same time I would remind you that you are dealing with a gentleman."

The assurance seemed to satisfy her. At any rate, she felt it was the only one she was likely to obtain from him.

"Your friend Arkwright said truly when he told you that your brother came to the Maison Verte for the sake of Angela," she began, slowly, "but he was wrong in thinking she flirted with him. I don't believe the girl has it in her to flirt with anyone. But she felt very lonely, and she liked talking to the handsome young Englishman, perhaps because he never approached the subject of love with her."

"As a matter of fact, I believe she grew to regard him as a friend; and it came to my knowledge that she warned him against coming to the house, hinting at the same time that the play was unfair, and he would inevitably lose his money in the end."

"In spite of this he still continued to come, but I was so enraged with Angela that I shut her up in her room on bread and water for three or four days, in the hope that it might bring her to her senses."

"On the fourth evening Mr. Bertie—for that was the name by which we knew him—came as usual, and it happened there was another young Englishman present, who was unfortunate enough to lose a good deal of money, playing *carte* with my husband."

"After he and everyone else, except Bertie, had gone, your brother deliberately accused my husband of cheating—told him the young idiot of an Englishman, whose name was Faulkner, was nothing more than a poor clerk, taking his holiday in Brussels, and that the sum he had lost meant ruin to him."

"Finally, he insisted on my husband refunding all his winnings. Of course Auguste refused, and then—well, they had a quarrel, and in the heat of passion Bertie was stabbed."

"In the midst of it all Angela came down—having been alarmed by the noise, and it was she who staunchly the blood as best she could—knowing, however, from the poor fellow's ghastly looks, that he was dying. It was she who pillowed him on her bosom, and it was in her arms he died."

Madame Leclercq stopped, and shuddered. Evidently the remembrance was not without its pang even for her.

"She could not see Victor's face, for it was hidden by his hand; but she noticed that the strong white fingers trembled a little.

"Well, we had a terrible fuss with Angela, who at first was like a mad creature, but gradually she quieted down when I told her that her parents' lives depended on her silence. Poor thing! She suffered horribly; but what could she do? However, she declared positively she would not remain another day at the *Maison Verte*, so we left immediately, taking with us what money we could obtain, which was little enough! After we landed in England we got on very badly, and Angela's restlessness increased. I felt sure she would not stay with us long, and so made her swear a solemn oath that, come what might, she would never betray that dark night's work. That oath she has kept!"

"Yes," said Victor, in a low voice, shaken with intense feeling. "She has, indeed, kept it, even at the loss of her own happiness. I am glad you have told me this," he added, "for even though we never meet again, it is a satisfaction for me to know her the noble creature I once believed her!"

Madame Leclercq looked at him curiously. "You are very fond of Angela! You would give a good deal if this dreadful crime that divides you could be swept away?"

"You are talking nonsense," Victor returned, harshly. "Nothing can alter facts." Then he added, in a different voice, "Would I not, indeed, give all I have in the world—half my life even, if the past could be wiped out!"

"Listen, Dr. Bethell!" said his visitor, with a certain impishness. "I have it in my power to render you a great service, and I have a mind to do it, and trust to your gratitude afterwards for rewarding it as it deserves. I am a poor woman, and I confess that money considerations have a great weight with me."

"Then you have come to the wrong place for reward. I am a poor man myself."

"So you may be, at present, but later on—" She checked herself, and remained for a moment in deep thought; then she said, with the air of one who has taken a resolution, "Yes, I will make a clean breast of it, and trust, as I said before, to your gratitude. In order to make things quite clear to you I must go back a little way."

"When Angela left me at Greycombe, my husband and I, after making several fruitless inquiries for her, went to London; and there he—like the wretch he was!—deserted me, and went out to Melbourne, with the result of being wrecked on the passage."

"I did the best I could to scrape along by myself, and one day I saw an advertisement in the paper, asking the heirs of the late John Philip Cleveland to communicate with a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn, who would be able to tell them something to their advantage. Now, this same John Philip Cleveland was my first husband, and Angela's father; so I at once put myself in communication with these solicitors, and I found that, through the death of a cousin of his father's and his two sons, my late husband would, if he had lived, have been heir to a large property, and a residence in Warwickshire."

"It was when I went down to look at this property that I so opportunely fell in with Angela. Now, as you may be aware, the law of England is very unjust to widows, and all I could claim of this fortune was just a third of the personality—which seems to me abominably unfair. Still, I had no doubt, and have no doubt still, that Angela would see it in the same light as I do, and let me have half the property—which I look upon as my just due. I hope you, Dr. Bethell, will look upon it in the same way."

"I have nothing whatever to do with the matter," he rejoined coldly. "I am sincerely rejoiced at Angela's good fortune in finding herself an heiress, but, beyond that, it does not concern me."

"Wait a minute, and you will see that it does, inasmuch as Angela Cleveland—that is

her real name—has not one drop of my blood in her veins. Her father was a widower when I married him, with this one child, who was only a year old, and who never knew that I was not her real mother. My husband died in less than twelve months following our marriage, and shortly afterwards I became the wife of Auguste Leclercq, and Angela was placed in a convent, where she remained until she was seventeen years old. Now, do you see how this concerns you?"

Yes, he did, and he sprang to his feet in a sudden ecstasy of joy.

There could be no shame to his brother's memory in taking back Angela now, since this man and woman, who were equally guilty as regarded Cuthbert's murder, were, in reality, no kin to the girl who had soothed his last moments!

The next day, by the very earliest train, Victor set out for Warwickshire; but it is a cross-country journey, and it was evening when he arrived at Rose Cottage.

The sun was setting in a bed of gorgeously-tinted clouds low down in the west, and the air was fragrant with the breath of mignonette and sweet peas and roses.

Mrs. Sedley, fearful of the evening dews, had gone indoors, and her profile could be seen silhouetted on the blind as she sat between it and the lamp, busily engaged in mending stockings.

Angela, meanwhile, was walking up and down the garden path, loth to leave the soft, scented dusk of the midsummer night for the hot, lamplit parlour.

She was bending down to raise the stem of a tall white lily, when she heard her name spoken in a voice whose sound sent every drop of blood rushing to her heart.

Before her stood Victor; but Victor with eyes full of love and longing—Victor with arms outstretched ready to take her to the heart that was henceforth to be her resting-place!

Afterwards, it all seemed like a dream to Angela, but a happy dream, from the chaos of which one fact stood out clearly—the barrier between her and her husband was broken down, and now nothing but death could part them.

And then, when Mrs. Sedley's voice was heard calling out peremptorily for Angela to go in, the girl took her husband with her, and with blushing pride introduced him to the old lady—who at last had her curiosity gratified with regard to Miss Clare's secret!

But all this happened twelve months ago; and now Victor Bethell has left Greycombe, and taken up his abode in his wife's splendid old home, Cleveland Abbey.

There is no need for him to earn his daily bread, for Angela is one of the richest women in the county; but, all the same, he has not given up his profession, although, when he visits the poor round about Cleve, he never takes a fee; and, in their estimation, he is the cleverest as well as the kindest doctor out of London.

Madame Leclercq has left England, having had an annuity settled on her by her stepdaughter on condition that she never presents herself at Cleveland Abbey.

At this proviso Madame did not grumble, though she chose to consider herself ill-used at not getting a greater share of her late husband's wealth.

She talked a great deal of her services in bringing Victor and his wife together by means of her confession, quite ignoring the fact that she made a virtue of necessity, as the truth must inevitably have come out before she could have got anything out of the Cleveland estate.

But of her Angela and Victor rarely speak. Their life is girt round with a radiance of sunshine, and the shadows that darkened the past are all blotted out in the happiness that encircles the present!

[THE END.]

Society

A NEW fashion set by Queen Alexandra of wearing in her dress a bunch of flowers put together with graceful carelessness is likely to become fashionable. They give one the impression of flowers which have been freshly gathered and thrust into the dress with the easy elegance of a refined hand. They have in this way a much better effect than the beautiful arrangements made up for ladies at the florists. The effect is natural, and it will be pleasant to copy it.

THE Emperor William has presented to the King of Italy four of the cannon secured by the German troops during the Chinese Expedition.

THE Emperor and Empress of Russia are about to leave for the Crimea, and they will remain in Livadia for about six weeks. The Czar has invited the Emperor William to pay a visit to Russia in order to view the manoeuvres of the Russian Fleet, which will take place off Revel in July. The Czar and his guest will inspect the scene from the Royal yacht *Standart*. His Majesty has also sent an autograph letter by Prince Ouroussoff to M. Loubet, inviting the French President to fix his own time for a visit to Russia. The date will probably be May 15, but much depends on the President's engagements.

PRINCE HENRY OF PRUSSIA is a very kind uncle, and when he was last in Berlin, the younger children of the German Emperor begged him to send them as many picture postcards as possible from America during his stay there. The children of Kaiser Wilhelm, as well as Prince Henry's own sons, are ardent collectors of picture postcards, and His Royal Highness makes a point of sending off a batch of cards to Germany from every place he visits in the United States.

THE DUKE OF BEAUFORT, with whom the Prince and Princess of Wales have been staying, is the ninth holder of the dukedom, and was for many years a hopeless and irremediable bachelor. Like his father, the late duke, he is a mighty sportsman, and, as Marquis of Worcester, was well to the fore of some of the fastest runs of the last half-century. His Grace has now a son of his own, but, failing such a possession, his nephew, Mr. Somers Somerset, would in time have worn the strawberry leaves. Old Lord Somers made a special proviso in his will that if Mr. Somers Somerset came in for the dukedom he was not to inherit Eastnor Castle, the beautiful place in Herefordshire, which he bequeathed to his daughter, Lady Henry Somerset, mother of the then presumptive heir.

THE new Countess of Dufferin, *née* Flora Davis, is the daughter of Mr. John H. Davis, a wealthy New York banker. Her mother, who was Mr. Davis's second wife, was herself a renowned beauty of Cleveland, and Miss Flora, as a child, was so delicately pretty that she came to be known as the Dresden China Beauty. She made her *début* in New York society at a great ball at Sherry's, and soon became as well known for her fine voice as for her beauty. It was in Paris, whilst studying singing under Ambroise Thomas, that she made the acquaintance of Lord Terence Blackwood, then a mere second son, and a poor *attaché* to his father's embassy there.

THEY made a love match with little prospect of anything better than a diplomatic secretaryship before the bridegroom, who was, in fact, Secretary to the Embassy at Stockholm when the tragic death of his elder brother, the Earl of Ava, in South Africa, made him heir to the marquessate. As Viscount Clanciboye, he returned to England, and was living at Cadogan Square, and serving in the Foreign Office, when his father's lamented death made him Lord Dufferin. He has two little daughters, but no son, so that the present heir-presumptive to the title is his younger brother, Lord Basil Blackwood.

Gleanings

The man with twins says it is hard work to hold his own.

If you can't marry a woman with dollars, the next best thing is a woman with sense.

CONVICT MARRIAGES.—Marriages between convicts continue to be permitted in the Andaman Islands. Last year the superintendent received sixty-eight applications for such unions. Of these, four free and thirty-two convicts were sanctioned, and the balance (thirty-two) were refused.

£43,855 WORTH OF MOTOR CARS IMPORTED.—Motor cars are for the first time included in the Board of Trade returns of January. We exported during the month twenty-seven motor-cars, value £7,301, and in addition "parts" value £5,691—total, £12,992. We imported in the same time 173 automobiles, value £35,330, besides motors and other parts value £8,525—total, £43,855.

SOUTH GERMANY'S OLDEST MONASTERY.—South Germany's oldest monastery, the Benedictine abbey of Wessobrunn, founded in 755 and confiscated in 1803, has been restored to the Benedictine Order by Baron von Cramer-Klett, a Protestant, and will soon be reoccupied by monks. The baron bought all the lands and remaining buildings of the old abbey for 900,000 marks from the Bavarian State and sold them to the Benedictines for a nominal sum.

DEFICIENT.—The following incident illustrates the Persian objection to a direct "Yes" or "No." A visitor to that country had asked if a certain man was honest, and on pressing this question: "Mirza Saleh closed his eyes in meditation, opened them and shook his head, closed them again, and then sat buried in thought, his fingers on his eyelids as though he would keep the truth from popping out all unawares. When he opened his eyes at last it was to turn to the dictionary for the English word. His face wore an expansive smile when he had found it. 'Sahib,' he cried triumphantly, 'de-ff-ci-ent!'"

THE GROWTH OF LONDON.—The county of London covers 118 square miles, and contains 4,556,063 persons, living in 608,000 houses, Greater London, over which the Metropolitan Police keeps ceaseless watch and ward, has a population of close of 6,000,000 and an area 686 square miles in extent. In vain we search elsewhere for an equivalent to these figures. The combined population of the three greatest Continental capitals—Paris, Berlin, Vienna—could be comfortably stowed away within the limits of Greater London. The three most populous American cities are New York, the second largest city of the world, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Yet if the inhabitants of these three cities were to be transported bodily to London, it would only be necessary to provide accommodation for an additional half-a-million of people.

HOW TO KEEP EGGS.—In view of the circumstances which exist in large cities it is not possible for everyone to be provided with eggs in the desired condition of freshness, and to meet the demand for this article of diet it has become the practice to treat eggs in such a manner as to preserve them in an edible condition for as long a period as possible. There are a number of methods whereby eggs may be preserved with more or less success, but the one which appears to be most successful consists in treatment with a solution of "water-glass." By this means an egg may be preserved in a condition fit for consumption for a period of some twelve months. No doubt an egg is at its best when it is newly laid, but failing this a method of preservation which practically depends upon the closing of the "pores" of the shell and hermetically sealing its contents cannot be objected to so long as nothing of a deleterious nature is used in the process.

The number of "darlings" at the beginning of a woman's letter is in direct ratio to the number of sovereigns demanded at the finish thereof.

POSTAGE IN THE REIGN OF CHARLES I.—In the reign of Charles I. the rates of postage were:—Under 80 miles, twopenny; 80 to 140 miles, fourpenny; over 140 miles, sixpenny; London to Scotland, eightpenny.

WHAT HE DID FOR THE CHURCH.—Asked at a church meeting what he did for the good cause, a grave and reverend steward replied: "Well, when a deaf person comes in I place him near the pulpit; if a lame person enters I find him a seat near the door; if a pretty girl comes up the aisle I put her in my own pew."

TALL PEOPLE.—The English professional classes are the tallest adult males in the world. The average is 5ft. 9in. United States males follow, and behind them come males of all British classes. Most European nations average for the adult male 5 ft. 6 in., but the Australians, Spaniards, and Portuguese just fall short of this standard.

THE PLAYGOER IN JAPAN.—In the land of the Mikado the theatre is not at all an ancient institution, as the Japanese count history. Nevertheless, it is not a Western importation. It was in the sixteenth century that play-acting by men and women took its rise from the favourite pastime in Japan even to-day—marionettes. The Japanese are extraordinarily clever performers of the puppet show, which as long ago as 1587 was a pastime of the Court at Tokio.

JACK'S SHAM BREAD.—"Jack's" resourcefulness in order to get his beloved tobacco ashore unscathed by the touch of the revenue officer is well known. All sorts of unlikely places and things aboard ship are used for stowage, but perhaps the most innocent method of concealment was that adopted by some old salts who left a big loaf of bread on the fore'side table, apparently uncut and altogether honest. As a matter of fact, it was a hollow mockery as far as its nutritive properties were concerned, but a very solid comfort in a nicotinean sense, for it was packed tight with cigars. "The King's Pipe" smoked them, the jolly Jack Tars being themselves "smoked" in the process!

THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS.—"I am one of those persons," said a young woman, "upon whom flowers will last a long time, but I find that they last much longer when I am well than when I am ill. This morning, for instance, I got a bunch of violets, and already they are dead you see. It is because I have been feeling 'dragged out.' My vitality has been low. Hence the violets suffered. In pleasant weather, when I am particularly strong and vigorous, I can wear a bunch of violets for three days. Why it is that flowers upon some persons wilt and upon others flourish no one knows; and no one knows either why the health of one wearing them affects the delicate blooms. These things are true, though, as any lover of flowers will tell you."

THE WEALTH OF LONDON.—London stands supreme, a sovereign among cities. It is the wealthiest municipality upon the face of the globe. The actual wealth of the city, which not many centuries ago was a dreary marshland, can only be guessed at. The value of its insured property is £932,598,661. The rateable value of its 600,000 houses is over thirty-nine million pounds sterling, and their gross rental value cannot be estimated at less than £48,000,000. The significance of these figures is apparent when we find that the combined rateable value of all the other boroughs in England hardly equals that of London. The wealth of London is not stationary; it advances year by year with leaps and bounds. The rateable value of the new property built annually within the limits of the metropolis is half a million sterling, while the rise in the rateable value of the existing property in the last five years has been £1,845,000.

BERLIN'S BLACK BOOK, the criminal record kept by the police, now consists of thirty-seven volumes, containing 21,000 photographs of criminals of all classes.

CORONATIA.—It is reported that several young married couples have had their newly-born daughters christened "Coronatia," in honour of the Coronation.

A BUTTER TREE.—In Ashanti there grows a tree resembling in appearance the English oak, which furnishes excellent butter. This vegetable butter keeps in perfect condition all the year round in spite of the heat, and in its natural condition.

HOW TO EARN MONEY.—"Any lady or gentleman desiring to earn a little money without any interruption to their ordinary business, write to B—, enclosing one shilling in stamps, and we will forward particulars." A gentleman who answered an advertisement of this nature received a laconic postcard: "Do as I do."

THE WORLD'S ALPHABETS.—The letters in the alphabets of the different nations vary in number. The Sandwich Islanders have twelve, the Burmese eighteen, Italian twenty-three, Bengali twenty-one, Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldean, and Samaritan twenty-two each, Latin twenty-three, Greek twenty-four, German, Dutch, and English twenty-six each, Spanish and Slavonic twenty-seven each, Arabic twenty-eight, Persian and Coptic thirty-two, Georgian thirty-five, Armenian thirty-eight, Russian forty-one, old Muscovite forty-three. Sanscrit and many of the Oriental languages have fifty each.

ARMY ANNIVERSARIES.—Two hundred years ago England was preparing for war with France and Spain, and the recruiting sergeant was sent round. Among the new regiments raised were nine, which are now the 1st Worcester (29th Foot), 1st East Lancashire (30th Foot), 1st East Surrey (31st Foot), 1st Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (32nd Foot), 1st West Riding (33rd Foot), 1st Border (34th Foot), 1st Hampshire (37th Foot), 1st South Stafford (38th Foot), and 1st Dorset (39th Foot). Consequently all these, of which the 29th, 30th, 33rd, 34th, and 38th are now in South Africa, celebrate their 200th birthdays during the next few months.

AN APOLOGY FOR APOLOGISING.—The tram gave a sudden lurch as the gentleman—there was no mistaking the fact that he was a gentleman—stepped aboard, and he trod on the toe of the crusty citizen of ample proportions who was sitting near the door. "I beg your pardon," he said. "The car started so quickly I lost my balance." "It's mighty strange," grumbled the large man, "that people come blundering into a car like that, without looking to see whose feet they're stepping on!" "Now, sir," said the other, politely raising his hat, "I beg your pardon for having begged your pardon." And as he seized a strap and beamed smilingly on the crusty citizen a faint cheer went up from the other passengers.

THE SILK HAT OF THE SEASON.—It might be thought that in Coronation year the fashionable silk hat would be exceptionally smart and new in appearance. Well, the silk hat that will be fashionable during the coming season is certainly smart, but there is nothing very distinctive about the style. The hat is of the usual height—about 6½ inches. An eighth of an inch more or less does not make very much difference to the appearance of a silk hat, but the manufacturers always measure by the eighth of an inch. A silk hat is made to look tall or short by altering the shape of the crown and the brim. The silk hat that will be fashionable this season is very slightly bell-shaped, and there is not much curl to the brim. The effect of this is that the brim appears to be rather narrower than usual and the crown taller. The hat is smart, but it will not suit everybody. It is most becoming to men with thin faces and tall slim figures.

LORD OF HER LOVE

BY EFFIE ADELAIDE ROWLANDS

Author of "Unseen Fires," "Woman Against Woman," [etc., etc.]

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Sadie Lancaster has grown up ignorant of her mother and father, and at the time of the opening of the story is a boarder at Park House Academy. Sir Reginald Derwent sends for Sadie to come to London at once and there join him. Sir Reginald is an invalid, and her heart goes out to him at once in womanly sympathy in his affliction, and she readily acquiesces in his wish to renounce all youthful pleasures for his sake. The need for Sadie's care and attention is, however, destined to be very short lived. Here many days are gone by Sir Reginald has another seizure, which proves fatal. With his dying breath he declares himself the father of Sadie, and, at the same moment, exacts a promise from Niel Gwynne that he will guard his only child.

A day or two previous to leaving Park House Academy Sadie had clandestinely married handsome Jack Ronalds. He is profuse in his avowal of his love for her, but will not agree to their marriage being made public. It is soon evident that his profession of love is but the mask of villainy, and he resorts to threats, in order to extort money from his wife to aid him in his profligate life. For some time Sadie remains true to the man she has taken for "better or worse," and it is only by his persistently churlish behaviour, that at last the mask is torn from her eyes, and she sees him as he really is.

The strain following on the death of her father and her own secret is too much for Sadie, and her health breaks down. Niel Gwynne arranges for his sister to accompany Sadie to the seaside, and it is while there, inhaling the health laden breezes, and in the company of her dearest friends that she reads the tragic death of Jack Ronalds, *ex* Magistrate. A few days after reading this news, Philip Brewer, her husband's friend, meets Sadie unexpectedly. He assures her that her secret will be kept inviolate and tells how Jack Ronalds had been guilty of forgery, and then murder, and how that his sudden death has really saved her much suffering. Philip Brewer and Bee Dalrymple soon become fast friends. Niel Gwynne is still ignorant of the dark page in Sadie's life but he is willing to marry her and know nothing. Niel suddenly comes into the title and estates of the Ardeans and this hastens their marriage. A cloud no bigger than a man's hand can, however, be seen sailing on the horizon.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE autumn weather may be dreary enough outside, but inside Knarlsborough Castle life runs in one luxurious charm.

Three weeks have gone since the day of the thunderstorm, and all that happened in it; and Sybil Warner is still an inmate of the delightful oak room, still confined to her apartment as an invalid.

She does not look very like one now as she sits at her writing-table busy with her pen. There is quite a colour in her cheeks, and a light in her cold, steel grey eyes.

"It has succeeded better than I could have dreamed!" she says softly to herself. "I wonder what Lottie thinks of my triumphant scheming? Envis me, I suppose. She would give ten years of her life to be in my shoes. Her prospects of being Lady Grafford do not look very rosy just now. Well, I can't say I pity her. To marry that cub, even with the title thrown in. Phoo! I would sooner be a slave or starve!"

She leans back in her chair and her brow clouds. "How different to the other one. Fool—fool! that I was to have acted as I did. If I had only been patient see what would have come to me! But how was I to know that plain poor Niel Gwynne would ever be Lord Ardean, a man of fortune, the owner of a home like this?" She plants her chin in her hand and knits her brow. "No; how was I to know, and it is too late—too late now! That puny baby-faced girl reigns here where I should have been queen. He loves her." She starts up suddenly, and paces to and fro impatiently. "I must not deceive myself. He loves her now; but he is jealous of her. He was always jealous, and with me he had cause—with her." She shakes her head. "It is early days," she mutters. "I can hope for nothing just yet!"

She folds her arms across her stately figure, and walks slowly up and down the long room.

She wears a loose peignoir of deep red silk, which falls in graceful folds round her tall form, and sweeps behind her in a long train. She looks wondrously handsome. It is a daring thing to wear that deep red colour with her warm auburn-tinged hair; but Sybil Warner can do what many another woman could never do. Marvellous is her beauty; the exquisite pallor of her skin, her dark brows and eyelashes shading her clear grey eyes, her firm mouth and chin—all is splendid, indeed perfect; and yet the face lacks something. With all its glorious beauty it has not a tithe of the charm that dwells in Sadie's pure one. Miss Warner attracts, commands attention; Sadie enthralled and captivates.

As she strolls to and fro, Sybil glances round the room. Everything is in exquisite taste; it is a habitation fitted for a queen, but her brows lower as she looks.

"That I should be guest here while she is mistress," she thinks; then with a shrug of her shoulders; "but I must be patient. Rome was not built in a day. I can wait!"

Wait for what? Sybil hardly knows herself. Her mind holds dim, mysterious pictures of a future which shall see Sadie somewhere in the background, and Niel once more at her (Sybil's) feet.

She has no settled plan of campaign. All she has settled upon is that the happiness which exists between Lord Ardean and his young wife shall continue no longer, and the greater the friendship between Sadie and herself grows the easier will be her task.

She has quite won Sadie's heart by her gentle graciousness, her patience under her assumed sufferings, her apparent loyalty and friendship for Niel and Bee.

She has gone cleverly to work with Sadie. She sees that all will go well if she deals frankly with the girl, and before she had been a week at Knarlsborough she had spoken gently and openly to Sadie.

"I must go as soon as Dr. Douglas will allow me," she had said, as Sadie sat beside her couch. She had smiled faintly as she spoke.

"Are you not comfortable here?" was Sadie's reply, to which Sybil had answered with a sigh.

"It is like Heaven to be with you, dear Lady Ardean," she said, carrying the girl's hand to her lips; "but—but— Ah! you will forgive me for speaking of it. I feel I know you will understand me when I say that it hurts me to be under your husband's roof. I—I—once did him a great wrong. Perhaps he has told you of it?" She stopped her shortly. Sadie's answer would be her cue how to proceed.

"Yes," Lady Ardean said, gently. "Niel has told me all."

Sybil checked a frown, and sighed again.

"Between such lovers as you and he perfect confidence is best. I was a foolish, a wicked woman dear Lady Ardean; but we are not always answerable for our actions, are we? Even you, I daresay, have done things in your simple life which you never cease to regret."

At these words Sadie had coloured suddenly and painfully, all ignorant, poor child, that the cruel steel-grey eyes were noting her confusion, and treasuring it for some future time. Sybil had taken no outward notice of Sadie's silence, but had gone on.

"So it was with me when—when I behaved so wrongly to Niel—I mean Lord Ardean; and it is because of the acute memory of that wrong that I say I must go from here. I—I cannot bear to be near him, and I know that I am not yet forgiven."

"Do not let that trouble you," Sadie had an-

swered, quickly. "Niel shall forgive you, as I know, I am sure, he has done long ago. You must promise not to worry about this, for I am certain Niel bears you no ill-will; indeed, I think he has tried to forget the past altogether, and has succeeded."

At this Sybil had suddenly set her white teeth, and registered a vow to pay Sadie back for this insult, as she termed it, in some like coin; and Sadie, intent on comforting only, and innocent of the anger she was kindling, went on in the same fashion for several minutes, feeling her heart warm towards this regally handsome woman who had sinned, and now repented. She went direct to Niel when she left her guest's room, and in her simple, frank fashion repeated to him all that had passed; and though Niel could not rid his mind of the first uncomfortable impression that had come on it, he could not refuse to listen to his darling's gentle urging that he should hold out the hand of friendship to the woman who years before had so cruelly trodden his heart under foot.

Besides, Niel, man like, was deceived, and considerably pleased by Sybil's frank dealing with Sadie; there was no beating about the bush—no insinuations or secret understandings. He felt that she had been honest and truthful, and he consequently was more easily persuaded to become friendly than he should have done under other circumstances.

So things had gone on during the three weeks that had elapsed; and as matters stand now, Sybil Warner is not only a guest, but a welcome one at Knarlsborough Castle.

Bee's sudden departure has pleased her more than she could express, and she loses no opportunity of cleverly and judiciously widening the breach between Sadie and her sister-in-law. That unlucky blush that had come to the girl's cheeks in the moment of confidence, brought there by that direct thrust about regretted acts, has never left Sybil's mind.

She thinks of it now as she stands by the wide fireplace, with its great brass fire dogs and logs of wood.

"Can she have anything to hide?" she asks herself. "Is it possible that she has some secret? Was there not some mystery about her? I must ask Lottie. I am glad she is coming here to-day."

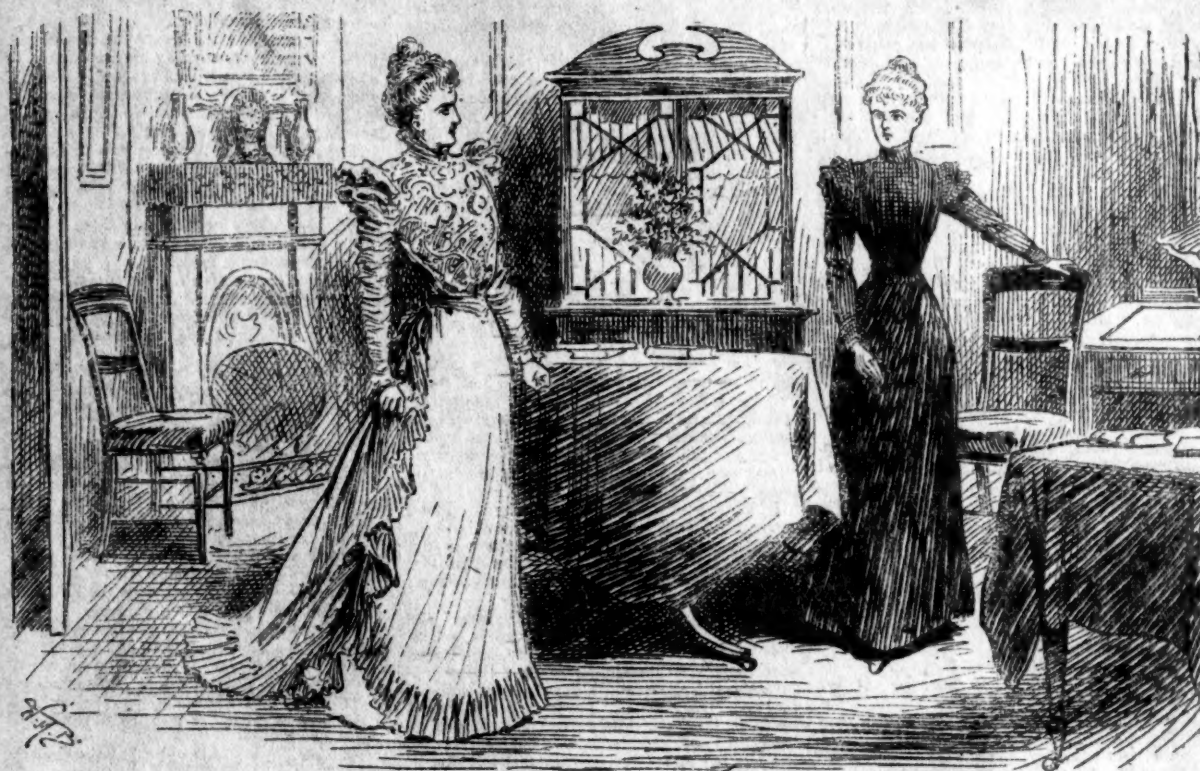
For by her wish, expressed very delicately, she has arranged for Miss Musgrave to visit the Castle for a few days. Neither Niel nor Sadie are exactly comfortable at this arrangement; but they do not like to make any objection to Sybil's wish, and so Lottie is expected, and needless to say is eagerly anxious to reach Knarlsborough.

Sadie is very miserable about Bee. She cannot rid her mind of the idea that she has been unkind to Niel's sister, although, to all outward appearances, she cannot but own that she has done right in checking all the cruel remarks that Bee made about Sybil, and in putting forward no objection to Mrs. Dalrymple's stated intention of leaving her brother's house for her own.

"I wish I understood it more clearly," Sadie thinks wistfully to herself. "It was so unlike Bee, dear generous, gentle Bee, who never said an unkind thing of a soul. Of course, I know she can never forgive Sybil Warner for the way she treated Niel—that is natural; but, though she could never be friends, still Bee need not doubt the poor creature so much as to declare that instead of saving me she caused my fall, and that her sprained illness and pain now is all her shame. It seems to me that we should be wicked to question it for an instant. I certainly did have a terrible escape, and all through Sybil Warner; though I miss Bee more and more each day. I can never, I hope, grow ungrateful or forgetful."

To Niel, whenever she speaks of Bee, she does so in a gentle, tender fashion, but Lord Ardean is not so considerate.

He is very angry with his sister. "I could never have believed it of Bee," he says now and then. "I grant her loyalty and love for me may have prejudiced her against



"T IS NEIL I WANT, AND NEIL I MEAN TO WIN . . . I WANT HIS LOVE," SYBIL SAY MALICIOUSLY.

Miss Warner, but beyond that there is no excuse for the way she has behaved. I am disappointed in her, Sadie. She has not the sweet nature I had imagined!" And then he goes off into his library alone, as he seems to do so often of late, and with a sigh Sadie mounts the stairs to sit and read with Sybil, and minister to her wants.

She goes very little of Niel, now, for Sybil seems to like to have her always with her, and Sadie cannot refuse to do such small deeds as are asked of her by the woman whom she looks upon as her deliverer from death. Still, she is growing anxious for Sybil to be quite well that she may go back to her old life; and though Dr. Douglas comes every day and arranges the injured arm, Miss Warner does not make rapid progress.

Sybil sees the eagerness and anxiety that is beginning to dawn on Sadie's face, and inwardly it pleases her.

"My lady cannot be so much with my lord now," she says to herself, as she stands by the fire. "So much the better for my plan of revenge. It is a good beginning; the end will not be so very far off. Surely if my illness has done nothing else it has helped to separate them! They have been easily deceived." She laughs shortly, "but perhaps even they might have been suspicious if Douglas had not come so well to my help."

She moves away from the fire and looks out of the window. There is a set smile on her face, but her handsome brows are knit.

"Yes," she mutters between her teeth, "I have to thank Douglas for it all; but will thanks suffice him? Will he not exact more?" With an impatient gesture she turns away, and is sitting at the writing-table again when a gentle tap at the door warns her that she must take up her rôle of invalid; and she has only just time to settle herself languidly in the big chair, and rearrange the scarf over her right arm, when Sadie comes in with the usual offering of lovely hothouse flowers, without which she never visits her guest.

"The carriage has gone to meet Miss Musgrave," she says, after she has made all sorts of inquiries after Sybil's health; "she will be here very shortly, I expect."

"I shall be glad to see her," Sybil answers, with the languid manner she always adopts before her hostess. "I hope you will like her, Lady Ardean. She has been a very dear friend to me."

"I will try to like her for your sake," is Sadie's gentle answer, though, to speak honestly, she cannot bear the thought of this seion of the Musgrave family coming beneath her roof. It seems, somehow, distinctly wrong to her dead father, so altogether contrary to his wish. It is true that Sir Reginald did not make any mention of the women, only of Gerald Musgrave, when he spoke of his hatred, but Sadie cannot rid her mind of the notion that were he alive now he would never permit Lottie Musgrave to approach his child or himself.

But what is she to do? Sybil has asked for her friend—Sybil, who is suffering now from her brave action which saved Sadie's life.

It is not the moment as Niel thinks to himself, to make any objection to so simple a wish. Besides, Niel is in his heart of hearts rather relieved. Sybil will now have her friend to nurse her, and Sadie need not be so much in the sick-room as she has been.

Despite his grat tuda and his stoutly declared belief in Sybil, there still lurks an uncomfortable sensation in his mind regarding her sojourn in Knarlsborough Castle, and her introduction to, and growing intimacy with, his darling.

He can never forget her treachery, her smooth falseness, though the sting of them has gone long since; but if she deceived once, why not again? is the thought that flashes through his mind now and then, when he has time to think about the whole affair.

It is a regrettable fact that Niel is so much occupied just now. Had he more leisure he would feel the approaching danger to his great

happiness more surely; but, as it is, he is claimed nearly every moment of the day on one thing or another connected with his newly-acquired estates; and, save for an instant now and then, he has not time to remember that Sybil Warner is in his house, the daily companion of his young wife, the one uncomfortable factor in his wonderfully peaceful, deeply-loved life.

Lord Grafford is still at Knarlsborough; his mother has left the World on a round of visits, secure in the thought that her one lamb is safe from the wolves, and Bee has been too miserable to write to her that the enemy is at hand. As a matter of fact, Bee knows nothing about the proposed visit of Lottie Musgrave, and, therefore, can do nothing.

Sadie is descending the broad oaken staircase as the carriage that went to fetch Miss Musgrave rolls up to the door, and with a fleeting colour she hastily passes into the library.

"I will not be false. I do not care to bid her welcome, and I will not do so," she says to herself.

But Lottie does not heed that her hostess is not present. She follows the housekeeper upstairs, her heart beating fast; and when the door is safely locked she executes a dance, descriptive of delight to Sybil, before she sinks into a chair.

"Well," greets Sybil, in her short manner, "and what do you think of me now?"

"That you are a marvel—a perfect Napoleon of strategy. How you have managed to keep so pale and interesting I don't know! Has Douglas given you something to make you ill?"

"No," Sybil returns, abruptly, "it is only acting good, but acting all the same. Sit down, Lottie, and I will ring for some tea. Lady Ardean usually gives it to me with her own fair hands, but doubtless she won't come to-day, as you are here."

"How do you find her?"

"A fool!" is the contemptuous reply. "A

fool, most decidedly. And I am not sure whether there is not a dash of the rogue too."

"She looked like a baby at her wedding," Lottie observes incredulously, as she takes off her hat.

"Baby faces are often the coverings of very old hearts. I cannot tell you just yet what it is I think, but that Lady Ardean has a secret I am convinced, and before very long I mean to find it out."

"Oh! you will succeed!" Lottie laughs easily, as she comes forward and kneels down before the log fire. "Douglas says he thinks no clever woman as you never existed before or can again."

"Douglas is very kind," Sybil answers, but her brows are knit; then with abruptness she goes on, "Grafford is here, Lottie, and you must make the most of your opportunities."

"I am to stay some time, am I not?" Lottie interrupts eagerly. "You are not going away just yet, Sybil?"

"I am not, certainly; but you are not me. Where is your mother?"

"Gone abroad," Lottie answers, with a downcast face, "on some wildgoose chase to find Gerald. As if that were possible."

"Has she a clue?" Sybil asks, with some interest.

Lottie shakes her head.

"Nothing worth speaking of. She remembers that he said he should go to Paris in the autumn, and so nothing will satisfy her but she must go there too. It is all very absurd. Gerald is dead, I feel quite sure. So why trouble any more about him?"

"Lottie, you are heartless!"

Miss Musgrave looks in surprise at her friend's stern face.

"And pray what are you?" she asks with a sneer.

Sybil rises suddenly, and sweeps to and fro.

"I am a miserable woman—aye! a miserable, hopeless, despairing woman, such as you, Lottie, cannot understand. My heart is like a coal of fire in my breast. My every thought is a yearning, a longing for one thing. Ah! you may well look surprised. I hardly know myself. I could strike a dagger into myself when I recall the past and my senseless folly. Lottie, I tell you I am mad! Mad with love for Niel! Love of Niel! The man who was once at my feet! My own, my boyish lover!"

Her cheeks are flaming, her eyes are like great stars in their brilliancy. Even Lottie, who knows her well, cannot resist a feeling of astonished admiration at her beauty.

Sybil catches her expression, stops suddenly, and laughs shortly.

"I suppose you think me a raving lunatic, Lottie?" she says.

"Well," confesses Miss Musgrave, candidly, "I really did not think this sort of thing was in you, Sybil."

Sybil sits in her chair moodily.

"Because you, like all the world, have never known me," she answers.

She gazes intently into the fire, and Lottie watches her in silence for a while.

"What are your plans?" she asks, almost timidly, after a few momentary pause. Truth to tell, she feels a trifle afraid of her friend in this strange mood.

Sybil draws her eyes slowly from the fire, and fixes them on Lottie's face.

"I was a fool once, and I mean to redeem my character in my own estimation."

"How?" asks Miss Musgrave, hurriedly.

"I mean to win Niel back. I mean to claim him for what he really is—mine, and mine alone!"

"But she—what of her? Have you forgotten her?"

"She!" How supremely contemptuous is her voice. "Poor creature! What is she against me? I care nothing about her. It is Niel I want, and Niel I mean to win. I only wanted revenge, Lottie, a month ago, but now that is changed—I want his love; and, unless I overrate my power, it will be mine. Oh! the task is not so difficult. A quarrel, a separation, a hint of dishonour, a divorce which

shall be well borne out by witnesses, I promise you, and then I reign here as wife and mistress of Knaresborough Castle."

She rears her tall form to its highest as she says this, and to Lottie she seems like some weird syren or prophetic old as she utters the cruel, malicious, wicked words, that if they mean anything carry death to the gentle girl who has so staunchly befriended her, and who, against all objections, still believes in and trusts her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

While Sybil Warner and Miss Musgrave are exchanging confidences upstairs, Sadie is experiencing a great surprise and pleasure below in the sudden appearance of Philip Brewer on the scene.

"How good of you to come! How glad I am to see you! But why did you not write me, and I would have met you?" she reiterates again and again, holding his hand in both her small ones. There is a ring of truth in her voice, and Philip feels that if ever a welcome was sincere, Sadie's welcome to him in her new home is that one.

It is, indeed, a gleam of pleasure, almost sunshine, to the girl, this advent of a real, honest friend. Why she is so glad to see him Sadie scarcely knows, save that she, like Bee, has grown to trust this man, and to feel strong reliance and faith in him.

"Niel is in his study; come to him," she cries, gaily; and thither they repair, where Niel extends a hearty greeting to this friend of his wife's. It is not long before Philip discovers traces of Sybil Warner's pernicious influence. There seems to have arisen a barrier between Lord and Lady Ardean—whence it comes or what it is he cannot determine; but the bloom has been rubbed off their wonderful happiness, and they are no longer the frank lovers they were. It is while Philip is talking to Sadie alone in her dainty boudoir that he arrives at the final determination that the girl is not comfortable, and he is pondering and turning things over in his mind how best to act, while Sadie chats on, when Mary comes in, and brings a message from Sybil.

"That Miss Warner feels so much better to-day she will be glad to come down into the drawing-room if Lady Ardean would like that arrangement."

Sadie sends back a courteous acquiescence, and then, rising, says:

"We had better ensconce ourselves before the invalid comes down. I am glad she is so much better. I suppose the arrival of her friend, Miss Musgrave, has done her great good."

"What?" Philip comes to a standstill. "Is Lottie Musgrave here?"

"Yes, she arrived an hour ago. Why do you ask? Don't you like her?"

Philip is silent for a moment.

"Have you seen her?" he asks, abruptly.

"Not yet." Sadie blushes at the remembrance of her avoidance of receiving her guest.

Philip pauses. Shall he warn Sadie? Will she see the great likeness that existed between Jack and his sister?

His mind works quickly, and he determined to say nothing, but trust to chance that the resemblance will not be so striking to Sadie. To tell her anything of the truth is to put her possibly at great disadvantage. Sadie is no skilful actress. She will never be able to conceal her agitation. He must do nothing, but as he follows the girl from the room he sends up a hearty prayer that she may be left in peace and ignorance.

Niel is in the drawing-room when they arrive, and at sight of Philip's thoughtful face he frowns slightly, his jealousy awakens again, and a quick query rushes into his mind as to what bond exists between his wife and this friend.

Even as Sadie comes up to him and rests her hand confidently on his arm he does not grow easier. He wishes vaguely that Philip had not come, and he wonders with a deep pang whether he has some clue to the dead

past in the confidence that so evidently exists between these two.

Bee's name has not been mentioned yet. Philip is careful to avoid speaking of her.

"Say nothing at all about me," Bee had commanded. "I don't want them to guess I sent you down, Philip," and so he follows out her instructions to the letter.

They are all three standing in a rather constrained silence, when the door opens and admits Sybil, leaning on Lottie Musgrave's arm.

Both men start forward, but Niel is first; and it is to him she clings with her left hand as she comes slowly forward.

Her eyes have seen Philip immediately, but she is not much affected one way or the other by his presence. She knows him very slightly, and has no opinion of his talents as a knave or a clever man.

Lottie Musgrave greets him with quiet surprise, and then she sends a sharp glance round for Lord Grafford, who happens to be out shooting.

She talks a little while to Philip while Sadie bends over Sybil and arranges her comfortably in a chair; then when all is done Lottie waits to be greeted by her hostess.

Philip watches Sadie's face most anxiously. The girl turns with a gentle smile.

"I must apologise, Miss Musgrave," she is beginning, when her eyes meet Lottie's, and the words die abruptly on her lips, while her cheeks flush, and then grow ashen white.

Philip hastily moves forward, eager to say anything—do anything—that will aid her, but he is foiled, as Lottie bends forward quickly.

"You are ill, Lady Ardean. How white you look! Oh! Lord Ardean—"

Niel moves hurriedly from Sybil's side, and comes up to Sadie.

"What is it, my darling?" he asks tenderly, and in alarm.

"Lady Ardean twisted her foot," Philip breaks in; "I saw her do it."

Lottie looks sharply at him, then glances at Sybil, who is watching this scene most breathlessly.

"Which foot is it, dearest?" Niel asks, in great perturbation. "Sit down awhile. Brewer, ring the bell; I will administer a pick-me-up. This is dreadful," Niel says, half smilingly, "two invalids at once!"

"Oh! let me help," Sybil cries, rising languidly; but Sadie wakes from her shattered condition.

"No, no; I am all right," she says, sharply. "I don't want anything."

Her eyes go to Lottie's face again, and grow fixed with fear. It is Jack's countenance she sees, line for line the same. A great horror and dread comes slowly on her. What is in the future? What cloud is it that is dawning on the horizon of her great happiness?

Sybil gives a sigh, and goes gently back to her chair, and Niel feels vexed with Sadie that she should have spoken so roughly.

"Had you not better be assisted to your room, Sadie?" he says, coldly.

She shivers at his tone. It seems to accord with the curious discomfort that is reigning in her heart; then she suddenly sees Sybil cast a tender, remonstrating glance at Niel, who has gone back to her, and is settling her in the chair, and the sight wakes her jealousy into being.

"I want nothing; I am all right," she says, in low, concentrated tones; and then, forgetful of Philip's kindly thought and excuse, she rises and walks rapidly from the room.

"Oh! I am so glad Lady Ardean is not much hurt; she does not even walk lame!" Sybil says, lifting her steel-grey eyes to Niel's face.

But Niel makes no reply. He is gasping after his wife's figure with a fixed stare, while a horrible suspicion creeps into his mind that there is some secret understanding between Philip Brewer and Sadie; or why should Philip have volunteered the excuse which she, by her own action, has proved to be a lie?

By a strong effort he conquers himself, and talks in his usual way to his guests, but how

he gets through a conversation he can never tell. While he is still striving to be natural, Sadie returns with Lord Grafford.

She is very pale, but the look of fear has left her eyes; and Philip conjectures rightly that she has been taking herself to task for her fear, and comforting herself by common-sense reasonings.

She comes up to Lottie, and commences talking quickly, as though saying to herself that, whatever the enemy was, she would grapple with it at once, and so overthrow it.

But a greater blow is yet in store for her—a greater trial to her endurance.

Niel, still fighting with the doubt that has been instilled by Sybil's artless remark about Sadie's perfect walking, feels that he cannot approach her in his present mood and discuss platitudes with this weight on his heart. So he keeps by Sybil's side, and fills her with much malicious delight as she reads Sadie's pain and jealousy.

Standing where he is, by Sybil's chair, Niel can yet follow the conversation going on between the others.

Lottie is coquetting a little with Lord Grafford, and it is a question of his that shoots the first arrow to the very being and centre of Sadie's happiness. He inquires, in his shy, awkward way, for Mrs. Musgrave, with whom, of course, he became acquainted when they were staying at the Manor.

Lottie sighs theatrically.

"Poor mamma!" she says, shaking her head; she is, I fear, growing more and more delicate. It is the mind that troubles her, Lord Grafford.

Philip, scenting danger, draws near.

"And Lady Grafford, how is she?" he inquires eagerly, though the Countess's health is a matter of perfect indifference to him.

The young man mumbles out some answer, and Lottie, having caught sight of herself in a mirror, and determining that the sad, downcast expression is exceedingly becoming to her, sighs again.

"Poor mamma! She is always sad, Lady Ardean. You know, we have had great trouble about my brother."

"I am sorry to hear that," Sadie answers, almost mechanically.

"Yes," Lottie goes on, finding Lord Grafford is looking at her. "Gerald was our pride, our dearest possession. He adored us as much as we adored him; our love was not an ordinary love." Sybil's lips compress with a contemptuous smile at the tremble in Lottie's voice, and Philip's brows are knit. He recognises the unreality of all this; but Sadie and Lord Grafford are both touched, and Niel feels a wave of sympathy even in the midst of his distressed thoughts.

"Separation is always hard; but when one loses one's loved ones, as we lost Gerald, it is more than hard. I am sure you will pity us, Lady Ardean, when I tell you we do not even know if our dear one is alive or dead. He simply vanished from sight this summer, and left no trace behind him."

"But surely you have some clue?" Niel breaks in quickly. "It is a hard thing for a man to disappear altogether nowadays."

Lottie shakes her head again.

"All through the early part of the year Gerald was absent from us. He was staying with some old friends in—shire; but we saw him constantly; and once I remember, when I was in the neighbourhood, he wrote and asked me to meet him in a small place near, called Upper Wentworth."

Philip involuntarily draws closer to Sadie's side. She has given a great start, and in her sweet eyes that look of dread and pain comes again, all of which is noted sharply by Sybil, and marked down in her memory against Sadie, poor child!

"That was the last time I ever saw Gerald," Lottie says, lifting her face with trembling lips to Lord Grafford; "and we have only heard from him twice since."

"Oh! depend upon it, he is all right. If Musgrave is anything like what he used to be he will turn up. I remember he was always fond of adventure," Niel observes, cheerily. He catches Philip's eye, and makes a sign as much as to say, "Let her remain in ignorance; what need to tell her that you know the man is dead?"

And Philip is silent, wishing from the bottom of his heart that he could first gag Lottie Musgrave and then cast her out of Knaresborough Castle, and with that treacherous, beautiful Sybil Warner out of Sadie's life altogether.

He feels he knows that the sword is about to fall; yet he is powerless to aid her, lest by so doing he deepens her difficulties, and adds to her misery. He has never felt so wretched; never at so terrible a disadvantage. He does not know which way to act for the best.

Lottie gives Niel a smile of gratitude for his words.

"How kind of you to try and comfort me! How I wish you may be right, Lord Ardean, that this dreadful suspense might end! If—if even we learned where our darling was buried it would not be so bad, but—" Here Lottie wipes away some imaginary tears with so much cleverness that Sybil feels inclined to applaud her. "Please, dear Lady Ardean, forgive me," Miss Musgrave continues, turning gracefully to her hostess. "I—I am very stupid. I—"

"Pray say nothing. I think I understand," is Sadie's reply, spoken almost with difficulty.

Lottie seems to check her rising sobs and control her tears, and Lord Grafford looks less uncomfortable.

"I did not mean to get on to this subject," Miss Musgrave says, with a faint smile; "it always distresses me. Thank you, dear Lady Ardean, for your kind, sweet sympathy; it is so pleasant to meet with a nature like yours. Why, I declare I have made you quite pale and anxious!"

Sadie's face is indeed white. There is an air about it that Philip remembers seeing that first night he saw her in the garden at Derwent Manor.

Once more he tries to avert the coming catastrophe—for that a catastrophe is coming he feels assured. But suddenly Sybil's voice comes across the room like a silver bell.

"What picture has your mother taken to Paris to aid her in her search, Lottie?" she asks, quietly.

She puts this question with great deliberation, urged she scarcely knows by what power, save that her quick brain eagerly seized on Sadie's start at mention of Upper Wentworth, and that Philip's anxiety seems to tell her that this subject of Gerald Musgrave is very nearly allied to the secret which she has determined Sadie possesses, and regarding which she has been so puzzled of late.

"There was an excellent portrait of Mr. Musgrave you showed me back in the summer. Do you remember it?" she goes on.

"Taken at some outlandish place? That very Upper Wentworth, you mean," Lottie answers, promptly. She has no cue to what Sybil intends doing, but she is smart enough to follow her more astute friend as carefully as she can. "Yes, I remember showing it to you quite well, Sybil; it was the very best Gerald ever had taken, and it is on that mother pins her faith. I have one with me upstairs. No, I believe I have it down here." Lottie takes up a dainty work-basket. "I always keep it where I can look at it most," she says, telling the falsehood with a faint sigh.

Sybil knows exactly how much affection existed between Lottie and her brother, and a sneer curls her lip at the remembrance.

Sadie has drawn near to a table, and is standing leaning against it, striving to control her strangely agitated feelings.

"Why should the mere mention of Upper Wentworth strike such a cold chill to her heart?" she asks herself. "Is she not foolish—more than foolish—wrong to torture herself

in this way? What connection can there be between this lost Gerald Musgrave's sojourn in Upper Wentworth and Jack Ronalds? The whole thing is a coincidence. It is, of course, unpleasant and uncomfortable that any word calling up that wretched past should ever be mentioned; but, still, after all, it is only a word, and—"

"Yes, here it is," breaks in Lottie's voice on her troubled musings. "There, Lord Ardean, you can judge for yourself if there was much difference between the Gerald Musgrave you knew and my brother of this year."

Niel took the portrait and looked at it earnestly, and Philip, his very fingers itching to fling the card into the fire, approaches him to take it from him, under pretence of looking at it—in reality, to prevent Sadie seeing it; but though he manages to hide his nervousness from Niel, he is not so successful with Sybil Warner.

Just as Philip's hand is outstretched for the portrait she leans forward.

"Will you allow me to look, Lord Ardean?" she says, very sweetly.

Philip's hand drops; he almost groans aloud as his eyes meet hers, with a sense of triumph in their steely depths. Niel turns to Miss Warner, and gives her the picture.

Sadie is still standing gazing out of the window, thinking, in a vague manner, when Sybil's voice reaches her ears.

"Would you not like to see this, dear Lady Ardean? Poor fellow; it is such a handsome face!"

The beads of perspiration are bursting out on Philip's brow. With a sense of acute pain the thought of Bee rushes to his mind. He feels almost like a coward when he realises how powerless he is to help Sadie at this moment.

He tries to give her a look as she passes, a warning to stop short; and were it not for that strange air about Niel, he would stride forward now—stand between her and this pictured ghost of the past, but to move an inch is madness. He has done all that he possibly can; Fate is too strong for him now.

He holds his breath, and his face grows drawn and white. He is so lost to the intensity of the moment that he is ignorant that Niel is watching him in a state of mad jealousy, doubt, and astonishment.

There is one moment's pause as Sadie takes the photograph from Sybil Warner's hand.

It has grown dusk now, and the light by Sybil's chair is so dim that it is difficult to distinguish anything, but the fire sends up a strong blaze; and though Sadie cares at this moment very little for what belongs to, or is connected with, this Gerald Musgrave, courtesy demands that she will show some interest in her guest's affairs. So with a faint smile, which lives only a moment, she shades her face with her hand, and, bending towards the fire, looks at the portrait.

The next instant there is a broken cry; the photograph falls from her hold into the grate, and as both Philip and Niel rush forward, Sadie sinks in a heap on the ground.

"It is her foot again," Philip exclaims, in sheer desperation. "I knew she hurt it just now!"

Niel makes no remark of any sort; he simply pushes Philip's hands on one side, and putting his arm round Sadie's slender form, lifts it as easily as though it had been a feather weight.

"Do not be alarmed," he says, curtly, to Sybil and Miss Musgrave. "My wife has only fainted. She—she unfortunately often faints. I will take her to her room."

With that he walks to the door, carrying Sadie with perfect ease, and passing through the hall he makes for the library.

Once there he puts his burden down gently, rings the bell, waits till the maid comes at his summons; and then, without a backward glance, he goes away with a heart that seems turned to stone, and a sense of disappointment and shame stronger than he realises exactly hanging over his head.

(To be continued next week.)

THE GOLDEN HOPE

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Lady Redwoode, the owner and undisputed proprietor of all the fair domain of Redwoode, has been left a widow a year or more previous to the opening of the story. Lord Redwoode left no heir, but expressed a wish that on the decease of his wife the estates should pass to their nephew, Andrew Forsythe, and never doubted Lady Redwoode's compliance with his wishes. Mr. Forsythe was musing over many things, and wondering what would happen to him should his aunt marry again. Judge then of his surprise when Lady Redwoode tells him the story of her early life. Secretly married when quite a girl, in order not to arouse the anger of her brother, with whom she was living in India, there came a day when it was necessary to tell all, and she some that followed caused Lady Redwoode to fall into convulsions, and she lay ill for many weeks. On returning to life and consciousness, it was to find herself a widow and a mother.

Sir Richard Haughton, although but twenty-seven, has lost all joy in life through an unhappy marriage. News is brought to him that his divorced wife, Margaret Sorel, is dying, and the messenger eagerly begs an interview on the pretext that Margaret desires Sir Richard's forgiveness. Margaret fails to rekindle the old love, and swears that no other woman shall ever become his wife.

Now Lady Redwoode's brother is dead, and as an act of reparation has sent all the necessary proofs of her first marriage, but the secret of the identity of her own child dies with him. The two girls are coming to England, and it is for Lady Redwoode to discover which of the two is her daughter. After a little hesitation in coming to so momentous a decision, the choice falls on Cecile, who at once sets to work to ingratiate herself with Lady Redwoode at the expense of her foster-sister Hellice, and in this she is ably seconded by the Hindoo ayah. Cecile's relationship is proclaimed to the assembled household; and to Hellice, who watches this rejoicing without one pang of envy, there suddenly comes a feeling of loneliness, and she turns unobserved into the garden to seek comfort among the shade of the trees. It is thus that she discovers Sir Richard Haughton, who for one moment gazes on the lovely vision ere it is lost to view. "I must see her again," he says. "Whoever and whatever she is I recognise her as my fate."

CHAPTER XXX.



THE programme which Andrew Forsythe had arranged for the coming of Anchester to Redwoode had been carried out. Upon the receipt of the telegram from town Forsythe had sought the Baroness and solicited her hospitality in favour of his pretended friend.

She had readily granted his request, and on his arrival had received the East Indian adventurer with the courtly grace that characterised her.

Totally unsuspecting of concealment of wrong-doing on the part of her daughter or nephew-in-law, she had looked upon Anchester's introduction to Cecile with smiling eyes, and had been amazed at beholding a glance of recognition flash from the eyes of either. The discovery had thrilled her with renewed doubts and sorrow.

"Have you ever met Mr. Anchester before, Cecile?" she asked, privately, at the first opportunity.

"Never, mamma," was the reply, and Cecile looked up in surprise. "Where could I have met him, since I have but just come to England?"

The Baroness was silenced, but not satisfied. Cecile's eyes had a furtive, untruthful look, and had quickly fallen before her searching gaze. She felt a conviction that the girl was deceiving her, but with what object or for what purpose she could not form an idea.

From that moment she became watchful and vigilant. Throughout the remainder of the day scarcely a word or look of Anchester's or Cecile escaped her. And when the evening had drawn near its close she had accumulated a mass of evidence proving that the two had met before, and that Cecile had the guest in considerable fear.

She had overheard Anchester, as if by a slip of the tongue, call Miss Avon "Cecile," and then had seen him look up guiltily at her, his face becoming complacent as she betrayed no consciousness of having heard him. She had intercepted two or three warning glances from Cecile to Anchester, and had been conscious

of a whispered colloquy between the two in the music-room.

The conversation had turned upon India, and, forgetting himself and his assumed character, Anchester had begun to describe with animation an elephant hunt he had once engaged in, and had stopped abruptly at a warning cough from Cecile.

His face had lighted up at a casual mention of Hellice, showing that he had known the exiled maiden, and he had otherwise betrayed a previous knowledge of the young cousins.

In short, while he flattered himself that he had played his part well, Anchester had continually given fuel to the rising flame of her ladyship's suspicions, and had, unintentionally, contrived to partially open her eyes to the characters of the three confederates.

Disheartened and sorrowful, at last, Lady Redwoode quitted the drawing-room, desiring only solitude. In the wide corridor she encountered the grey-haired old attendant, whose office it was to admit and usher out visitors. Impressed with a sudden idea, she beckoned him to her, and, after some casual direction, intended to veil her principal business, she said:

"By the way, Martin, has not this friend of Mr. Forsythe's been at Redwoode before?"

"Not to see Mr. Forsythe, your ladyship," was the reply. "He came yesterday, and sent up his card to Miss Cecile. He told me he was just from India, and was an old friend of my young lady."

"I thought he had been here before," said the Baroness, quietly. "It is all right, Martin. Don't forget to attend to the orders I gave you!"

With a slight inclination of her head—for Lady Redwoode was too true and gentle a lady to omit the forms of politeness, even when addressing the most humble of her servants—the Baroness passed on, ascending the stairs to her own rooms.

We shall not attempt to depict the sorrow and sleeplessness which haunted the hours that followed. Gradually the conviction gathered force in her soul, strengthened by a hundred trivial circumstances which we have failed to chronicle, that Cecile was false, deceitful, and vain.

She believed that both the young girls—Hellice and Cecile—had been warped and ruined by their early training; that neither was true, good, and honourable. But of the two, her heart yearned most over the exiled one, the one whom she believed to have tempted her life.

From the purport of her letter to Hellice, the reader is already aware what was her ladyship's answer to Sir Richard Haughton's request.

The young Baronet would not accept her decision as final, and he came again to Redwoode on the day subsequent to Mr. Anchester's arrival as a guest. He found the Baroness alone in her boudoir, bending in deep agitation over a letter, which she half concealed at his entrance.

"You have bad news!" he said. "Perhaps my coming is inopportune—"

"Stay, Sir Richard. Read that!" and the Baroness tendered the letter.

"You have a right to know how shamefully you are being imposed upon!"

The young Baronet perused the epistle at once, his blood mounting higher in his cheeks at every sentence. It was the letter from Miss Kenneth, and contained an accusation against Hellice as a secret poisoner and the attempted destroyer of the spinster. He read it through, even to the declaration that Holly Bank could no longer afford the maiden shelter, and then he exclaimed, with flashing eyes and indignant voice:

"What folly! What madness! Every

one seems to have turned against that angel! Would that Miss Kenneth were a man, that I might make her apologies humbly to poor, innocent little Hellice! Of course, dear Lady Redwoode, you will send at once for your niece, and bring her back to her rightful home! You refused to do so yesterday, but now no alternative remains!"

The Baroness clasped her hands convulsively, while her features worked with an emotion that was almost unendurable.

"I cannot!" she said, in a husky voice. "You know not what you ask, Sir Richard. Hellice shall be cared for. Mr. Kenneth shall find another asylum for her, but she cannot come to Redwoode!"

"Why not?" demanded the Baronet, sternly, his fine face growing rigid in its lines, and his mouth compressing itself closely.

"Because—Oh, Sir Richard, you cannot understand me if I endeavour to explain. I love Hellice better than Cecile—better than my life—better than my hopes of happiness hereafter! She has twined herself about the inmost fibres of my heart. Her voice is the sweetest of music to me—her eyes beam upon me the sunniest light—her step sets my heart throbbing more quickly—and the touch of her hand thrills me with a delicious pain! She is like a part of myself, like the half of my soul! Cecile has no such power over me. If Hellice comes here, she will, unconsciously to herself, turn my heart from Cecile. She will make me miserable and dissatisfied with my child, and her love will be no consolation to me. She would have killed me while I slept for a paltry sum of money. Oh, it is horrible!"

Her ladyship shuddered, and her face grew yet paler.

Sir Richard's sternness vanished. A glow of love and tenderness transfigured his countenance. A look of enthusiasm appeared in his eyes, and a smile of hopeful confidence fluttered over his lips.

"Lady Redwoode," he said, and his impressive tone fixed her attention, "you have been wickedly deceived. It was not Hellice who attempted your life. It was Cecile—"

"Cecile!—You mistake. Even had Cecile been capable of such an act, she could have had no motive. Hellice has told you this to screen herself!"

"Dear Lady Redwoode," exclaimed the Baronet, unheeding her reply, while his look of enthusiasm deepened, "have you never attempted to solve the mystery of Hellice's power over you? Your instinct has misled you—fatally misled you! Cecile is your niece, and Hellice is your daughter—the child of that early and fatal love! Your greater love for Hellice is the result of the promptings of nature. Your maternal instincts have awakened—they turn from Cecile—they claim Hellice!"

Every feature of Lady Redwoode's face quivered; something of Sir Richard's enthusiasm was imparted to her; her heavenly eyes glowed with mingled hope and fear; her nostrils dilated; her lips trembled; and the colour fled in and out of her cheeks with frightened rapidity.

"If it should be so!" she murmured.

"It is—it is!" cried the Baronet, believing his own convictions. "Does not Renee's greater love for Cecile prove that Cecile is her grandchild? Does not the very isolation of Hellice prove her to be your child?"

"I don't know!" said the Baroness, excitedly. "Renee is very artful. She would not be apt to betray her designs to anyone. She is mercenary, and would cling to the one who would pay her best. I have thought it all over night after night, Sir Richard. Renee, I am sure, would desert her own grandchild if she could thereby benefit herself. Cecile is fairer—she resembles me—she must belong to me!"

"Your brother resembled you, dear Lady Redwoode, did he not?" asked Sir Richard, significantly.

The lady assented, and then hurriedly arose and paced the floor with quick, uneven steps.

Her mourning robes, which she had resumed, fell behind her in a sable train, like a heavy cloud. Her golden hair was gathered smoothly away from her pale brows; and in her eyes brooded a sorrow too deep for tears.

Sir Richard's heart responded to hers in tender and respectful sympathy.

"Dear Lady Redwoode," he said, so softly that she was soothed by his voice rather than disturbed; "does not your heart tell you that I have spoken truly? Shall this young girl, whose life may have been derived from your own, shall she remain desolate among strangers? Suppose she is guilty—though the very supposition is intolerable to me, who know her so well—will the suspicion of strangers, their harshness, their watchfulness, make her better? Suppose she were driven to despair and madness. Suppose that she should yield to a terrible temptation to destroy her life—suppose—"

"No, no!" interrupted Lady Redwoode, putting up her hands, as if to shut out a vision of horror. "Go for her, Sir Richard. Bring her back to me. Let her be what she will, henceforth my home shall be hers. Guilty or not guilty, true or false, I shall not let her go from me again. Better death at her hands than this constant wearing anguish. Bring her to me as soon as possible, Sir Richard!"

The Baronet forbore to urge his suit, or again solicit the consent of the Baroness to his marriage with Hellice. His first point had been gained. Redwoode was to be again the home of Hellice, and it would be strange if Hellice's sweetness did not soon disarm Lady Redwoode of her objections to the proposed alliance.

He lingered an hour or two longer, knowing that there would be no train to North Eldon until evening, and then took his departure. He stopped in the drawing-room on his way out, and had a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Forsythe and Cecile. Mr. Anchester had left Redwoode some hours earlier on a plea of business in town, and was at that moment making his proffer of marriage to Hellice at Holly Bank. Having paid his compliments to the betrothed pair, and admired sufficiently some newly-arrived bridal presents, Sir Richard bade them good-morning, mounted his steed, and rode back to Sea View, there to pass his time as best he could, until the hour approached for his journey.

He had not been long gone from Redwoode when Cecile made her appearance in Lady Redwoode's boudoir, and seated herself quietly at her mother's feet. She saw that the Baroness had been undergoing a period of excitement and agitation, and she connected her discovery with Miss Kenneth's letter, which lay forgotten upon the floor.

She picked it up stealthily, as if about to restore it, and read it through with much inward exultation.

"A letter from Hellice, mamma?" she asked, as she laid it on Lady Redwoode's knee. "You know that it is from Miss Kenneth, since you read it," returned her ladyship, coldly.

Cecile's face flushed, and she bit her lips in annoyance.

"I did glance over it," she said, "and read enough to see that Hellice has been detected in other attempts at poisoning—"

"Not detected, Cecile," said Lady Redwoode, somewhat sharply, "but suspected!"

"It is all the same, mamma. Miss Kenneth would not say so much if she had not strong evidence of my cousin's guilt. What will be done with Hellice now? Of course, you will give her up entirely?"

There was an expression in Cecile's face as she asked the latter question that impressed the Baroness most unfavourably. It betrayed so much joy and exultation in the anticipated friendliness of Hellice; so much anxiety to be rid of her finally and for ever; so much malignancy, in short, that Lady Redwoode felt a sentiment of aversion against her chosen daughter—so powerful that it frightened her.

"No, I shall not give Hellice up," she re-

sponded, very coldly. "I have requested Sir Richard Houghton to go for her and bring her back to me. She will be here to-morrow."

Cecile's countenance fell. Her eyes betrayed their disappointment and chagrin.

"Why, mamma, how dare you have her back?" she exclaimed. "She will poison us all. It is not safe. I shall not let her approach you, lest she destroy the life so dear to me!" and the girl made a movement as if to caress Lady Redwoode's hand.

"Do not be alarmed about me," said her ladyship, evading the caress. "I am able to take care of myself, Cecile. You need not interfere between Hellice and me. I am determined to arrive at a full understanding with Hellice as soon as she arrives. There may be something with regard to the poisoning affair that may materially alter my present opinion of my niece."

Cecile vainly endeavoured to conceal her alarm and apprehension.

"I see," she said, with an involuntary sneer. "Sir Richard Houghton has been playing upon your doubts and fears. It seems to me that by this time you might have your mind decided one way or the other. It is exceedingly unpleasant for me to look forward to an exchange of positions with my cousin. Why, the very servants will soon hesitate to address me as Miss Avon, not knowing but that Hellice may have been installed into my place. I am tired of being dependent upon the merest caprice—the fluctuations of a mind distracted and played upon by designing people—"

"Cecile!" interrupted Lady Redwoode, sternly, looking at the girl incredulously.

"It is true!" cried Cecile, almost beside herself with fear and anger. "You recognised me on my arrival as your daughter. Your instinct arose to claim me. Yet now you question that instinct—my likeness to you—the proofs that I am really your child! You are as variable as the wind, as uncertain as a weather-vane! At a smile, a word, or a look from Hellice you are ready to discard me in behalf of a detected poisoner, a designing creature, who hates me, and who would exult in my downfall!"

"Cecile!" again exclaimed the Baroness, and this time in a tone of such commanding sternness that the girl's weaker nature quailed before her. "Be silent! I will not listen to such language!"

Cecile gave heed to the command, lapsing into a sullen silence, and wearing an injured air. Lady Redwoode became silent, too, oppressed by her further discovery of the girl's real character, and looking now and then at Cecile's downcast face. It was an unlovely countenance now in its sullen wrathfulness. There was no beauty in the pouting lips, or in the angry face, nothing to call out tenderness or affection.

Lady Redwoode turned from it with a swelling heart.

After a long pause, during which she strove to regain command of her temper, Cecile looked up with an unclouded brow, and said:

"Well, mamma, do as you think best about Hellice. I beg your pardon for my unfilial conduct, and can only excuse it on the ground of my love for you. I cannot bear that Hellice shall have any opportunity to attempt your life again. Can you forgive me?"

The Baroness yielded a quiet assent.

"And, mamma," continued the girl, in a wheedling tone, "I want to ask a favour of you. Andrew says he is sure you will grant it. I don't know how to tell you in such a way that you will not misunderstand me!"

"Say it plainly, and without circumlocution."

Still Cecile hesitated. The face of the Baroness was not altogether reassuring. It seemed to her still cold and stern, and the demand she was about to make seemed to grow preposterous, although an hour before she had deemed it easy to ask, and felt sure of its being granted.

"It is this, mamma," she said as Lady Redwoode did not come to her aid, and her

tone became still more wheedling. "Andrew's income is small, too small for two to live upon in decency or comfort. Of course, we know that you will dower me handsomely, and that I am your declared heiress, but that does not quite satisfy us. You have been very generous to us so far, and I—that is, Andrew—thought, if the subject were hinted to you, perhaps you would settle the Redwoode estate upon me at my marriage. You would have your private fortune left, you know!" she added, as the Baroness made no reply, "and you could live with us, of course!"

"You are very kind!" said her ladyship, drily. "You and Andrew seem very solicitous for my comfort. I shall make no promises, Cecile. I even decline to state the amount of your 'dowry.' Andrew does not marry you for wealth, but because he loves you. He is very disinterested, my dear. Your marriage settlements shall be made out in due time before your marriage. Indeed, I will send for my solicitor at once, so that he may draw up the necessary legal documents to-morrow. Are you satisfied?"

Cecile answered in the affirmative, although there was a strange smile on Lady Redwoode's face that greatly puzzled her. That smile haunted her when she hastened to Mr. Forsythe to tell him of her supposed success, and in her dreams that night she beheld it again, but so significant with meaning, so indicative of a thorough comprehension of her and her motives, that she awakened in great affright, her brows covered with a cold perspiration.

Her perceptions must have been keener in her sleeping moments, for in her dreams she read the strange smile aright!

CHAPTER XXXI.

The train that carried Sir Richard Houghton back to North Eldon, with a heart overflowing with tenderness and sympathy for his unfortunate betrothed, carried also Mr. Kenneth, whose brotherly regard for his sister had been quickened by news of her supposed recent escape from death at Hellice's hands. The two gentlemen made the journey in almost perfect silence.

The very thought of arguing Hellice's innocence, and thus conceding a possibility of her guilt, was insupportable to the young lover, and Mr. Kenneth, astute lawyer as he was, and deeply as he had been interested in the accused maiden, entertained no doubt of her guilt, and had little patience with what he considered a blind and foolish faith in her.

So the two gentlemen preferred to maintain a rigid silence, speaking only at intervals upon the most commonplace subjects, although Mr. Kenneth was now and then tempted to express his pity for the Baroness, and endorse with emphasis the advice that had been given Sir Richard by Lady Redwoode.

At North Eldon they found Miss Kenneth's old-fashioned coach in waiting. They entered it together, and still in silence were driven rapidly towards Holly Bank. It was dark when they arrived at their destination, and the comfortable, rambling old house was lighted throughout. They sprang out, and were met within the wide hall by the spinster herself, who had attired herself in honour of her brother's coming.

Her dress was composed of heavy dead-green silk, and her cap-ribbons were of the same unbecoming hue. The effect of her attire was to render her complexion more than ever sallow, and to throw into relief the livid circles around her sunken eyes. Her appearance confirmed her story of attempted poisoning beyond all cavil in the mind of her brother.

"My poor sister!" he exclaimed, in tones of deep feeling, embracing her affectionately.

"Thank Heaven! Your life has been spared!" "Yes, thank Heaven!" reiterated the spinster. "I still live, brother; but I doubt if I shall ever recover from the effects of the poison. That misguided girl carries death wherever she goes. Another day of her pre-

sence at Holly Bank would have been enough to destroy us all!"

"She will not be here another day, sister," replied the lawyer, following Miss Kenneth into the pleasant drawing-room, accompanied by Sir Richard, whose grave, stern face was becoming impatient and eager. "Sir Richard Haughton and I have come to relieve you of your charge. We will set out by the morning train with Miss Glintwick. Lady Redwoode consents to receive her again at Redwoode, and will resume her guardianship of her niece."

"Be kind enough, madam, to summon Miss Glintwick at once," interposed the young Baronet, after a fruitless survey of the pleasant apartment. Miss Kenneth looked from her brother to Sir Richard, and back again with an expression of helplessness and anxiety. Her manner impressed the lover with sudden fear.

"Helice is not ill?" he cried.

"Not ill!" stammered the spinster, looking appealingly at her brother. "I couldn't help it, Sir Richard—I did my best to prevent it—but she is gone!"

"Gone!" echoed the Baronet and the lawyer in a breath.

"Yes; she went this morning," said Miss Kenneth, desperately. "I—I told her what I had written to Lady Redwoode. That, and Lady Redwoode's letter, refusing the Baronet's consent to her marriage with Sir Richard Haughton, and the consciousness that she had been thoroughly exposed, drove her nearly frantic. She rushed out into the garden, and I did not see her again for two hours. When she came in at last, she was as pale as death, her eyes glowed like fireballs, and her manner was as quiet as—as our rector's. She went upstairs without a word and came down again in the course of an hour, with her tongue on, her bag in her hand, all packed for travelling, and told me she was going away—"

"My poor, poor darling!" ejaculated Sir Richard, involuntarily, with a quivering lip and darkening eyes.

"What did you say to her?" demanded Mr. Kenneth.

"Of course I forbade her departure. I told her you would be here this evening without fail, but all I could say made no impression upon her. She was as cold and haughty as a princess could possibly be. She thanked me for my hospitality, requested that her luggage should be sent to Redwoode, and walked out as quietly as if she had been only going for a stroll in the garden."

"You should have stopped her!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Why did you not detain her?"

"How could I?" said the spinster. "I had no authority to do so. She was my guest, and not my prisoner. I had no right to control her actions."

"Where did she go?" asked Sir Richard, arousing himself from his grief, seeing the necessity for prompt action.

"I don't know. I supposed she would go to Sea View or Redwoode by the evening train."

"She may have done so," said the Baronet, with an accession of hope. "Your coachman drove her to North Eldon then?"

"She went on foot and alone, and took the road that leads to North Eldon," responded Miss Kenneth, in a tone that inclined strongly to hysterics. "You must not blame me, Sir Richard, for allowing her to go in the way she did. I have suffered enough already on her account, without being blamed by her friends. Only think, brother," she added, addressing the lawyer, "Miss Glintwick had the impertinence to tell me this morning that I had not been suffering from poison at all, but simply from indigestion! As if I did not know my own symptoms!"

"Sir Richard," said Mr. Kenneth, making no comment upon his sister's aggrieved statement. "Miss Glintwick is doubtless at this moment laying her case before Lady Redwoode. She was wise to lose no time in seeking her ladyship and make provision for the future. We will follow her by the early morning train."

Of course you will spend the night at Holly Bank?"

The young Baronet was compelled to accept this invitation, as a return to Redwoode that night was impossible. He believed that Helice had gone back to Redwoode, and soothed himself by believing that at that very moment she was winning her way back to the heart of the Baroness.

The evening was long and passed away drearily. Miss Kenneth entertained her guests with details concerning Helice and her own sufferings, and boasted of her own forbearance and longsuffering. Sir Richard scarcely listened to her, and was glad when he was shown to his room at last—the very room that had lately been occupied by his betrothed.

He knew at once that it had been her chamber, the position of the window at which he had seen her proving the fact. But there were other proofs that touched him yet more nearly. A lace-bordered handkerchief, faintly scented with jasmine, lay in a window-seat. A volume of poems, prettily bound, and marked in delicate penciling in its noblest passages, lay on the centre table. A fan, formed of the gorgeous plumage of some tropical bird, and set in gold and ivory, lay forgotten on the mantelpiece—a fan which Sir Richard had often seen in Helice's hand, played with more than Spanish grace.

The handkerchief and book he put into his pocket, moved by the spirit that animates all lovers to gather up and treasure some token that had belonged to the best loved one. There was an atmosphere of purity about the room, an air of lightness and grace that seemed to him to have emanated from Helice, who was the incarnation of grace. There, in the room where she had passed sad and sleepless hours, he thought of her, and his soul responded to hers in greater strength and love, and an ineffable longing came over him to gather his betrothed in his arms and nestle her in his bosom, where no token of the world's harshness or malice could reach her.

He waited impatiently for the morrow that would, he hoped, restore to him his love.

Yet that morrow was doomed to bring him only disappointment.

Miss Kenneth and her guests met at the breakfast table, and soon after the conclusion of the repast the gentlemen set out in the family coach for North Eldon. Arrived at the station, Sir Richard made inquiries concerning Helice, but could not ascertain that she had been at the station on the previous day or evening. The guards and porters had no recollection of having seen a young lady answering to her description, and further inquiries elicited the fact that no passenger had been booked by the previous night's train to Wharton.

Encouraging himself with the fancy that Helice might have forgotten to procure a ticket, Sir Richard gave himself little uneasiness as to her whereabouts or safety. Mr. Kenneth was equally assured, and the two gentlemen entered the railway carriage.

The Redwoode carriage awaited them on their arrival at Wharton, and Sir Richard's first words to the coachman were if Miss Glintwick had returned home. He was answered in the negative. Then, for the first time, a foreboding of evil entered the baronet's mind.

"Not returned!" he said, growing pale. "Why, Miss Glintwick left Holly Bank yesterday, and yet she has not arrived. What can this mean, Mr. Kenneth?" he asked, in a lower tone, addressing the lawyer. "Helice knew no one in England to whom she could go in her distress. Can she have destroyed herself in despair?"

He asked the question in a hollow whisper, and awaited a reply as a condemned man awaits the sentence of death.

Mr. Kenneth's rosy little face turned singularly pale.

"Nonsense!" he ejaculated, testily. "The girl is a great deal too crafty to do such a

thing. I beg your pardon, Sir Richard. I should have said that Miss Glintwick does not belong to the weak and unstable class from which suicides are chiefly drawn. She has a will strong enough to conquer even greater difficulties; a soul resolute enough to remain undaunted even by greater reverses; and nothing, I imagine, could possibly drive her to self-destruction. Under different circumstances and training she would have been a glorious woman. When I look at her in this way I disbelieve in her guilt."

"Thank you," interrupted the Baronet, quietly. "I think also that Helice would not commit suicide. She may be at Redwoode, after all. There are other stations near at hand besides Wharton, and she might have spent the night at one of them."

"If not, she has probably written to the Baroness," said the lawyer. "At any rate, Lady Redwoode may be consulted immediately with regard to her niece."

This assertion could not be controverted, and Sir Richard preceded Mr. Kenneth to the carriage, the two entered, and they were driven to Redwoode.

The family was gathered in the pleasant breakfast-room, awaiting the arrival of the exiled maiden with widely different emotions. Lady Redwoode's heart was throbbing wildly, and an eager light flickered in her lovely eyes.

The declaration of Sir Richard's belief that Helice and not Cecile was her child haunted her still, and she was prepared to meet the wronged girl without reproaches, even with kindness and affection. Cecile and Andrew Forsythe were both uneasy and thoughtful, dreading Helice's return above all things, but the pulses of the latter were quickened at the thought of meeting the peerless maiden whom he passionately loved.

When Sir Richard Haughton and Mr. Kenneth were ushered into the room the waiting ones looked in vain for one who came not with them.

"Helice, where is she?" asked Lady Redwoode, in surprise.

"Is she not here?" questioned the young baronet.

"Here? How should she be here?" said her ladyship, wonderingly. "Have you not brought her with you?"

Sir Richard replied by telling his story. Lady Redwoode's heart sank as she listened, and Cecile's blue eyes sparkled with a joy she could not hide. The Baroness, Sir Richard, and Mr. Kenneth all observed her delight at Helice's non-appearance, and all were disgusted at her ill-timed exhibition of pleasure.

"Helice must be sought for at once," declared Lady Redwoode, when the lover's story had been concluded. "I shudder at the thought of that friendless young girl being left to herself. She is as ignorant of the world as a child, and her extraordinary beauty will draw upon her the eyes of the wicked, dissolute, and unprincipled. Search for her. Engage detectives to hunt for her. I shall not know one happy moment until she is found!"

She paused, astonished by an unmistakable sneer that rested on Cecile's lips. On finding that she was observed, the girl's countenance changed, and she exclaimed, lightly:

"Why should you search for Helice, mamma, after her terrible display of ingratitude to you? Suppose you should bring her back to Redwoode, she might poison you most effectually at a time when even my love and care could not save you. I will not have Helice under this roof!"

She stopped abruptly, awed by the stern glance that shot with lightning power from Sir Richard Haughton's eyes—a glance that struck horror to her guilty soul, assuring her that he held her in his power, and could expose her wickedness to the being she had most deceived. She held her breath in terror.

"Cecile!" said the Baroness, gravely, looking at the girl with a cold, calm gaze that gave another pang to her disquietude, "do not let me hear any further allusions to the cause

of your cousin's expulsion from Redwoode. My home shall be Hellice's henceforth and always."

"Why, mamma!" faltered Cecile, abashed and confounded. "I thought you hated my cousin!"

"Hated her! Oh, heaven!" exclaimed Lady Redwoode, with irrepressible anguish. "Hate Hellice, when I do not know but that she is my own child! Hate her, when I long for her presence daily and nightly!"

The looks and tone of the Baroness betrayed a more passionate love for the exiled maiden than she had ever yet exhibited towards Cecile. Her chosen daughter became alarmed, and exchanged significant glances with Mr. Forsythe, who was by no means untroubled.

"I will obey your wishes, dear Lady Redwoode," said Hellice's lover, sympathizingly. "I will search for her, engage detectives if need be, offer rewards, spare neither time nor money, and give myself no rest until Hellice is found. I shall not return to Redwoode until Hellice comes with me. I will go back to Wharton immediately and telegraph up and down the line!"

"Shall I accompany you?" inquired Mr. Kenneth.

"No. My uncle will be my companion and assistant. I will stop for and take him with me."

Lady Redwoode made no protest against Sir Richard's instant departure. Instead, her appealing gaze encouraged him to depart at once. He had not seated himself since his arrival, and he now came forward, took her ladyship's hand, and said, in an impressive whisper:

"Be of good courage, my dear friend. I will restore your innocent and wronged daughter to your arms again!"

He pressed her hand, and hurried out to the still waiting carriage, while Lady Redwoode, a prey to the greatest agitation, fell back in her chair, his last words ringing in her ears.

When she looked up at last, suddenly, it was only to encounter the basilisk gaze of Cecile, whose fixed glance startled her with its full expression of a terrible hatred!

From that moment Lady Redwoode regarded her chosen daughter with aversion. Her affection for her gave place to dislike, and, though she inwardly reproached herself for what she deemed her fickleness, she enthroned Hellice in the holy of holies of her heart, where Cecile had never yet had place, and began to believe the wronged maiden true, and good, and worthy of her best love. And more, she began to hope, as one hoping against hope, that Hellice might prove to be her child!

With what ardour she longed for the maiden's return!

There was a long and oppressive silence, broken only by the whisperings of the young betrothed couple. Mr. Kenneth sat apart, his round, rosy face preternaturally long, and his gaze fixed furtively on Cecile, whose manner had inspired him with sudden suspicion. The silence had become irksome to all but the abstracted Baroness, when the door opened, and Lady Redwoode's solicitor was ushered into the apartment.

He was a tall, thin man, with sharp features, a pair of keen, honest eyes, the air and manners of a man of business, and an expression of countenance that declared at once his unassailable integrity and his worldly wisdom.

He made a low bow, addressed particularly to Lady Redwoode, but meant to include the remaining members of the party. The Baroness acknowledged the civility courteously and desired him to be seated. He obeyed, taking possession of a chair in front of a small open writing-desk that had evidently been placed for his accommodation.

"You have already been informed, Mr. Lally," said Lady Redwoode, "of the reason why I have requested your presence this morning. This young lady, Miss Avon, is my daughter by an early marriage, prior to my union with Lord Redwoode. She is about to contract a marriage with the nephew of my late husband, Mr. Andrew Forsythe!"

"Exactly so, madam," said Mr. Lally, bowing to each of the betrothed young couple. "And I am here for the purpose of drawing up the marriage settlements!"

He glanced admiringly at the pretty bride elect, approvingly at Mr. Forsythe, meditatively at Mr. Kenneth, and then drew forth from a portfolio he had carried under his arm a quantity of paper, a bunch of quills, and a bottle of ink, closely stoppered and capped beyond possibility of accident. He arranged these articles to his liking, dipped his pen in the ink, and then awaited further instructions.

The hearts of Cecile and Mr. Forsythe beat high with expectation.

Remembering Lady Redwoode's lately expressed doubts regarding the two cousins, they did not expect her to impoverish herself in their behalf. But they did expect a gift of Redwoode, or its full equivalent, and the minds of both began rioting in gorgeous dreams of wealth, and the splendours it would furnish them.

Lady Redwoode was perfectly aware of their sentiments, and their eagerness to learn her intentions; but her manner was unusually deliberate, as she said:

"Mr. Lally, you are not here to draw up marriage settlements in the true sense of the term. Mr. Forsythe has an inconsiderable income, of which he can bestow nothing upon his bride. My daughter is entirely dependent upon me, her father having been a poor secretary, and having found use for his salary as it was paid in."

"I see, madam," said the solicitor, with a smile. "You purpose dowering the fair bride, and desire this dower to be inalienable. Is not that it?" and he again dipped his quill into the ink.

"Not quite," said her ladyship, slowly. "I intend that my daughter shall inherit Redwoode, but before we proceed to business, Mr. Lally, permit me to relate to you confidentially the circumstances attending my recognition of my daughter."

The solicitor shook the ink from his pen, and leaned back in his chair, preparing to listen.

"Mamma," interposed Cecile, shrugging her shoulders, "it is not necessary that this—this person should know our private affairs. I beg of you to let our secret remain so still."

Lady Redwoode did not heed the appeal, but the lawyer looked at the young lady with a sudden decrease of respect and admiration. It was his business to be entrusted with family secrets, and he had long been the adviser of Lady Redwoode in matters where Mr. Kenneth felt himself inadequate. Like the truly refined and well-bred lady that she was, the Baroness had treated him with the most unvarying courtesy, and he made a mental comment now that her daughter was not worthy of her.

Lady Redwoode proceeded to relate her history, as she had related it to Andrew Forsythe. She detailed her lonely orphanage, her brother's assumption of her guardianship, her acquaintance with Rolf Avon, and her secret marriage with him, exactly as the reader has been made aware of the facts.

She told of the discovery, the enforced separation, her child's birth and loss to her, her husband's death, and dwelt upon her child's adoption by her brother, and the fact that he had never permitted her to know which of the two children was her own. She told how she had discovered the fairer babe to be her own by reason of its nurse's neglect of it and the aversion evinced towards it by her brother's wife.

She told of her subsequent marriage with Lord Redwoode and why she had kept the existence of her child a secret even from him. She narrated the facts of her brother's tardy repentance and death, the coming of the two girls, her choice between them, and her recognition of Cecile.

"A marvellous story!" ejaculated the solicitor. "I do not see how you could have chosen between them. There is nothing, however, like a mother's instinct, I suppose. The wisdom of Solomon cannot be compared to that

subtle feeling we call instinct. Are you certain, Lady Redwoode, that you have chosen rightly?"

"No, Mr. Lally, I am not certain," was the reply that startled both Cecile and Mr. Forsythe. "I think Cecile is my daughter, because she looks like me. Hellice is darker, and the fairer babe was mine. Still, I am uncertain and ill at ease. My child must be my heiress. Until I know absolutely which of these two girls is my daughter, I shall guard her heritage safely."

"Quite right, madam," said the solicitor. "Where is the other young lady? Perhaps my impartial judgment may be of use."

"Hellice is not at home," said Lady Redwoode, her brow clouding over. "I hope she will be here to-morrow, however."

"She attempted to poison mamma," declared Cecile, speaking angrily, "and I know she is Horatio Glinwick's daughter, and that I am Lady Redwoode's child. My old Hindoo nurse will tell you the same. I cannot understand why mamma is contented one day and doubting the next. At any rate," she added, somewhat triumphantly, "mamma dare not disown me entirely. She will have to give me as much as she gives my cousin."

Mr. Lally considerably bent his gaze upon his paper. Mr. Forsythe gave his betrothed a warning glance. Lady Redwoode looked up, pale and thoughtful, but quietly resolute.

"Andrew Forsythe says that he seeks Cecile from love, and not from self-interest," she said.

"I have not deceived him or Cecile with regard to my sentiments. They have both known that my mind was not made up as to my daughter's identity. Therefore, Mr. Lally, I shall not wrong either of them by whatever I may do. I desire to add to their income, so that they may live as befits their rank. They have consented to stay at Redwoode with me, making my home their own. Should we change that plan, other arrangements can be made for their future. My gift to Cecile is not intended as a final one."

The solicitor spread out his paper afresh, and filled his pen.

Cecile and Mr. Forsythe became eager with expectation.

"She cannot do less than give me her private fortune," whispered the girl, with bright eyes and glowing face.

"I wish to settle upon Cecile," said Lady Redwoode, deliberately, "the sum of one thousand pounds a year. That, in addition to Andrew's five hundred a year, will be ample for their wants, seeing that a home is supplied to them here. Put it down, Mr. Lally. I have nothing more to add."

"A thousand pounds!" exclaimed Cecile, pale with anger. "A paltry thousand pounds out of a yearly income of twenty thousand. It is shameful. I refuse so small a pittance. I expect ten thousand at the very least. If I were only your niece, mamma, you ought to give me that. You are miserly—"

Lady Redwoode looked at her sternly and commandingly, and she dared not finish her angry exclamations. Mr. Lally, apparently unconscious of the girl's display of temper, wrote on evenly and quietly. Mr. Kenneth watched the maiden in silent amazement. The document, securing to Cecile a thousand a year, was only drawn up, signed, sealed, and witnessed. Even to the last Cecile expected that the Baroness would command a change to be made, but as she did not, the girl became unbearably sullen and defiant.

"The business is concluded," said her ladyship, with a sigh. "The young people are provided for, the arrangements are all completed, and we have only to await the marriage ceremony."

She spoke wearily, as if her burden were more than she could bear, but not a smile tinged Cecile's lips, and she uttered not a word of love or gratitude. If she were really the daughter of the Baroness, it was easier to predict for the latter still heavier burdens, still greater trials, in the future.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Miss Kenneth's description of Hellice's departure from Holly Bank had been correct. The young girl had gone forth on foot and alone, sadly resolute to find for herself some refuge, where her pursuing fate should be evaded. No one had spoken to her a kind word at parting. Her hostess had followed her to the door, uttering vague warnings, and denouncing her for an attempted crime, of which the maiden could not by any possibility have been guilty; the maids peered out at her from behind the window-curtains, and pitied and condemned her in a breath; the old gardener, as she passed him with an inclination of her head, muttered that the world was no fit place for one so strangely beautiful, and that he would rather see a child of his in her grave than in Hellice's friendless condition. But not one, not even the humblest dependent at Holly Bank, had cheered her with a kindly look or friendly word. Unconscious of the attention her departure excited, the maiden pursued her way, and Holly Bank was soon left behind her.

It was her intention to walk to North Eldon, and to take the train from that station to the little Scottish town nearest the address given her by Mr. Anchester. The morning was warm, the walk was long, and her travelling-bag, filled with necessary changes of garments and toilet appurtenances, was very heavy. Her mind was oppressed with uncertainty as to her reception at the hands of Mr. Anchester's supposed relative.

What if the rector's widow, she thought, should demand the reason of her homelessness, and refuse her shelter and protection on learning the truth? No thought that the "rector's widow" was a myth entered the girl's mind. Mr. Anchester had been the intimate friend of the late Mr. Gintwick, and, in memory of that friendship, Hellice believed that he was about to befriend her.

She knew little of the wickedness that defiles the world, and suspected no evil at the hands of anyone excepting Cecile and Renee. She believed Mr. Anchester's proffer of friendship to be honest and straightforward, and she thought of him as she walked onwards with a sense of deep gratitude warming her heart.

"No one can ever find me in that secluded spot," she thought. "I shall disappear completely, and my fate will be a mystery to Lady Redwoode and dear Sir Richard. It will be better so. When time shall have passed, and Cecile shown more of her true character, they will all do me justice. They will know then that I was incapable of the crime imputed to me."

She sighed wearily, and quickened her pace. Resolutely dismissing all unerving thoughts, she turned her mind towards her future, and began to picture her probable reception by the rector's widow. The necessity of a letter of introduction from Mr. Anchester to his relative began to dawn upon her mind. She was almost dismayed at the prospect of being obliged to introduce herself, of having to answer innumerable questions, and of being possibly, after all, deemed an adventuress.

"Perhaps I had better give up the idea of going there," she said to herself.

She had scarcely begun to entertain the thought when it grew into favourable proportions. But if she gave up this prospect of a home, where could she go? Not to Redwoode. She had been sent away from there, and she had in her pocket Lady Redwoode's stern, rebuking letter, forbidding her marriage with Sir Richard Houghton. Not to Sea View. Delicacy and maiden pride forbade her seeking the home of her lover. She must go to some lonely little village—but her appearance in such a place, alone and unfriended, would, she knew, make her the centre of malicious gossip. Besides, Lady Redwoode would, doubtless, from a sense of duty, search for her, and her search could not be otherwise than successful, should Hellice make her home in a country hamlet or town. No refuge offered itself but

London; but from the great metropolis the girl shrank in fear and dread.

She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she had not observed the gradual approach of a carriage over the road, but she was now startled by the near sound of wheels. Looking up, she beheld a small vehicle, drawn by two spirited horses, and she instinctively moved nearer to the hedge to allow it to pass. As she did so the carriage stopped, and she recognised the only occupant of the vehicle with a feeling of gladness. It was Darcy Anchester.

"On your way to North Eldon, Miss Gintwick?" he said, with a respectful bow and a pleased smile. "I came back on purpose to see you. It occurred to me that you might like a letter of introduction to my cousin, although it is not strictly necessary, for she is the simplest-hearted woman in existence. I have written the letter though, and here it is."

He drew it from his note-book and extended to the maiden an unsealed letter which she accepted gratefully. He bade her read its contents, and she obeyed, her pride soothed by the delicate and kindly terms in which he spoke of her as "the daughter of a deceased friend who had benefited him in many ways."

He enjoined the "rector's widow" to show Hellice the utmost hospitality, and told her that the maiden would probably remain permanently with her. He concluded by regretting that he could not visit his relative during his present stay in England, and enjoined her to accept Hellice in his stead.

"You are very kind, Mr. Anchester," said the maiden, as she refolded the letter.

"Not at all, Miss Hellice. I am only trying to repay my indebtedness to your father. You will be very welcome with my aunt—that is, my cousin. She is often lonely in her old country house. But you look tired," he added. "Let me convey you to the station. You should not walk so far on this warm day."

Hellice hesitated but a moment. Mr. Anchester looked at her so kindly and so frankly that she could not doubt his disinterestedness. She allowed herself to be assisted into the vehicle, and Mr. Anchester turned his horses and drove back in the direction he had come. He kept in this course for a little distance, then turned into a cross-road, saying, as he met the maiden's inquiring gaze:

"I am not going to take you to North Eldon, Miss Hellice. The express trains do not stop there, and you will be obliged to wait until evening, or take a parliamentary train. I shall drive over to the nearest town, and you will scarcely be obliged to wait for an express."

"Thank you," replied Hellice. "You are very thoughtful, Mr. Anchester. A day of inaction would torture me. I should not like to wait at North Eldon until evening," she added, "for Mr. Kenneth is expected then."

A drive of twenty miles lay before them, but the morning was one of those sunny ones that Hellice loved, the horses were spirited, and Mr. Anchester exerted himself to prove a genial and pleasant travelling companion. He talked almost incessantly, recalling Indian scenes and adventures, speaking of Cecile, Renee, and Redwoode, praising the Baroness, and declaring that life at Redwoode was almost equal to life in Eden.

He had tact enough to avoid unpleasant allusions, even while causing Hellice to look back regretfully to the home from which she had been exiled. He said nothing about his love for her, but spoke and acted as if his affection had been fraternal, and as if he had relinquished all hope of ever making her his wife. There was in his manner a subdued sadness that was intended to flatter the maiden, but it did not obtrude itself upon her notice. It was his aim to win her sisterly confidence in him, and he was not unsuccessful in doing so.

He was resolved to woo her gently, patiently, and persistently; to heed no repulses, but to win her at last, if winning were possible, and he did not allow himself to think of any other alternative. His love for her made him gentle

and tender, and no upright lover could have exceeded him in delicate and affectionate attentions.

The drive came to an end at last. Hellice drew her veil over her face as they entered the principal street of a bustling town, although the hurrying people were all apparently too busy to look at her. Mr. Anchester drove directly to an inn, made some inquiries about the trains, assisted Hellice to alight, took her travelling bag under his arm, and conducted her to the station.

He left her in the ladies' waiting-room while he procured her ticket, and then returned to her with the information that a train was about to start. Giving her his arm, he led her to the platform, placed her in a carriage, with special injunctions to the guard to look after her comfort, and said, as he held her hand in a final clasp:

"I have written to my cousin to expect you, Miss Hellice. You had better make the journey leisurely, stopping over night somewhere on your route. Have no fears. You will find a home where you are going!"

He pressed her hand warmly, and stepped back, as the locomotive gave a warning shriek and the train moved out of the station. A look of triumph lighted up his face as he turned away, hastening about his business—a look of which Hellice was blissfully unconscious as she was borne on her journey.

For an hour or more the young girl had the carriage to herself, but after a time other ladies were ushered in, and in listening to their incessant chattering she forgot her own sorrows. She was as yet so unfamiliar with English scenery and English life that she found ample occupation in looking from the windows upon the fair, green fields, the lovely parks, and the pleasant homes, and in listening to the gay conversation of some school girls, whose age was about the same as her own, and whose laughing faces showed not the faintest trace of care or trouble.

When these young girls withdrew Hellice felt lonelier than ever, and the monotonous sound of the wheels, the occasional scream of the engine, the close heat, and the dust became intolerable to her. Her head began to ache with a heavy racking pain that almost blinded her, and she feared that she was about to be ill, her pulse beating so quickly, and her skin being so feverish.

The instinct of self-preservation was strong, although life had lost its charms for her. Early in the afternoon she alighted from the train at a rural village, which was half buried in trees. A single fly was in waiting for a chance passenger; Hellice took possession of it, and commanded the driver to take her to the best inn the place afforded. The driver obeyed, and the vehicle rolled over a smooth country road, bordered with houses, set in pretty gardens, drawing up at length before a rustic inn, where vines climbed about the windows, benches were scattered before the door, and horses drank leisurely from great cool deep troughs beneath the shade of trees.

It was one of those hospitable inns that seem almost to have disappeared since the advent of railways, and the sight of it gave Hellice a sense of restfulness in the midst of her fatigue and pain. She followed a neat and prim chambermaid upstairs to a lavender-scented chamber, and sank down upon a couch, her head pressing the pillow with a delightful feeling she had never before known.

She felt with something of terror that all her trials and sorrows had not been without effect upon her physical organisation. She felt wearied beyond expression, unable to think, conscious only of a blinding pain in her forehead, and a desire to rest. She felt if she gave way to these symptoms she should be very ill, and she struggled against them with all her remaining strength.

Her first act after a brief rest was to take a bath. She then ordered tea, and after partaking of it fell into a delicious sleep, from which she awakened at evening refreshed and strength-

ened—in short, herself again. Her clearness of thought came back to her cool brain, and she knew that the fever which had threatened her had been ward off.

She spent the evening in her chamber, slept well at night, and in the morning resumed her journey. Not wishing to tax her strength too far, she adopted Mr. Anchester's advice, and stopped again that afternoon at a little town in the north of England, where she spent the night, continuing her journey on the ensuing morning.

It was, therefore, on the morning of the third day that the young traveller entered Scotland and neared her destination. According to Mr. Anchester's directions, she alighted at a country town halfway between the border and Edinburgh—the market town patronised by the rector's widow.

The station was at one end of the dreary, straggling place, but there were no carriages nor omnibuses in waiting. The only vehicle that seemed intended for the use of passengers was a dilapidated fly, the driver of which appeared to have come to the station simply from curiosity, for he looked at the maiden with a curious gaze, and made no sign of alighting from his box.

While Helice stood in silent perplexity, the train passed on, and she was forced into action. There were two or three idlers on the platform, but their appearance was not sufficiently prepossessing to tempt the maiden to address them. She was about to speak to the driver of the fly, when she observed the approach of a chaise, which was sufficiently striking to command attention anywhere.

It was very ancient, of a dingy colour, and came onward with a loud rattling sound that defies description. Straps and ropes hung in bits here and there like ornamental tags. It was drawn by a skeleton horse, which seemed blind and decrepit with age. The harness of the animal was a strange mingling of leather and rope. The equipage seemed to belong to a past century, like the sleepy, dreary town itself, and its charioteer was strangely in keeping with it in point of oddity. He was a great, overgrown, shock-headed youth, with sleepy eyes and vacant countenance that did not light up into anything resembling an expression, until he had drawn up behind the fly in what he evidently deemed grand style, and then he looked around with a smile of good-natured triumph.

Helice permitted herself to be momentarily amused by the strange arrival, and then she advanced to the driver of the fly, and said: "Can you take me to a place called the Rookery, some miles from here?"

"The Rookery," repeated the man, "why that be the Rookery carriage, ma'am," and he pointed at the antique vehicle behind him.

Then, with an expression of countenance, as if he deemed himself defrauded, he cracked his whip, and drove away.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2021. Back numbers can be obtained through any news-agent.)

Henpecked.

To be a henpecked man, a man must of necessity be a married man.

No self-respecting man would submit to be lorded over by any other woman than his wife. The landlady of the bachelor comes in a close second after the wife, for she is the arbiter of his destiny, in that she controls the hash and the fresh towels. But she doesn't have the chance that the man's wife has. The little matters that the wife has forgotten, or overlooked in the busy hours of the day, can be attended to and rounded up after she has got her spouse safe into bed, with the light out, and no matches handy.

And under those circumstances, most husbands will listen to anything rather than get up and poke round in the dark for the suit-

able habiliments in which to make a creditable escape.

In spite of the fact that the world is full of henpecked husbands, no man cordially enjoys being lorded over—that is to say, no man except the young and ardent lover.

And that deluded and "obfuscated" young man will endure anything if she says he must. While the fit of pursuit is on him, he will fetch and carry at her bidding like a trained dog. His heart bounds with exultation when he has her rubbers and waterproof and parasol to carry. Something that she has touched—a-h-h! Something that her dear little feet have been encased in! Almost a part of her!

He will undergo misery of soul, and the ridicule of the giggling girls in the draper's trying to match a ribbon for her.

He will order coal for her mother, and buy meat for her maiden aunt's cat, and lend the old man a sovereign without winking. It is astonishing how dear to him is anything in anywise pertaining to her. He loves the house-dog which backs at him furiously every time he opens the gate; and the very hens and roosters in her father's back yard are not like the vulgar, ordinary hens and roosters one is likely to meet in every-day places. He feels that it would be sacrilege to roast one of those fowls, and if he should taste of a soup made from the remains of one of them, he would feel as if he were eating some of his blood relations. How could he ever devour a bird to which she had said, "Biddy, biddy, biddy?"

After marriage it is different. The man no longer enjoys being a pack-horse, or an errand-boy, and only the superb generalship of the understanding woman can keep him in the ranks of the submissive subaltern.

The man who is henpecked never admits the fact to himself. He is very fond of telling the boys what he would do if he had a wife like Smith, or a vixenish shrew like Brown's wife. The woman, he says, doesn't live who could dictate to him, and perhaps he believes it; but nobody else is deceived. And when there is anything said about the supremacy of woman he swells up like a turkey cock, and his neighbours know that in a pitched battle he would be of about as much consequence as that gorgeous biped after the axe has fallen.

The man who is henpecked is looked out for by his wife. She saves him oceans of care. She selects his ties. She advises him about his braces. She keeps the number of the shirts and drawers he wears; and when he is going to buy any of those useful articles, he takes her along to remember the size. The trousers she condemns he takes back to the shop and exchanges. He blacks his boots when she thinks they need it. He shaves at her suggestion, and trims his whiskers to her liking. She tells him when to wash his neck, and when to take a pill. She puts her prohibition on the young women to whom he is not to lift his hat, and advises him to cross ever when he is going to meet one of them.

He marches to the tune she fiddles.

He turns the wringer on washing days, and hangs out the clothes while she sits by the window and offers wholesome counsel as to the details of the operation. He can make coffee, and fry steak, and he gets the breakfast Sunday morning while she lies in bed with a novel—she says she is getting her Sunday-school lesson—and calls at intervals down the back stairs, something in this wise:—

"John, what's a-burning? There's an awful smoke somewhere. Pull out that back draught. Seems to me I hear the cat mewing. See if she isn't shut up in the pantry. Don't forget for mercy's sake, slam things round so! There won't be a whole dish in the house. Don't forget to rinse out the coffee-pot. Take the cloth off the canary's cage. Poor thing! He might smother to death for all a man would care! John, why don't you take up some water to poor little Tommy? He's been crying for it full an hour. Strange to me that you never think of anything that ought to be done! Do you hear me, John? Oh, dear, dear! men never

hear anything they don't want to hear! Never!

And, by and by, when John is laid away where the henpecking wife cannot trouble, and the weary are at rest, his weeping widow will assure all sympathising friends that she never opposed John in anything, and that he and she always thought alike on everything that came up! And she will add that it is a great consolation to her to think it was so.

A Human Finger-Post.

The sight of a woman neatly dressed, and in the best of health and spirits acting as finger-post and directing people on their way, is rather a novel one. Yet this is what, in a figurative sense, Mrs. R. Ziegler, of 2, Withnall Street, Wigan, is doing daily. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness restored her to health when she had been in a terrible condition for five years; and all whom she hears of suffering as she did she points to the way of escape.

To a "Wigan Examiner" reporter the other day she said:—"My illness lasted upwards of five years, and in my debilitated state I used to have a feeling that life was scarcely worth living. For days together I was afraid to eat anything, as directly afterwards I was seized with the most horrible pains and other distressing symptoms of indigestion and biliousness. The least effort brought on shortness of breath, and left me for some time as weak as a baby. Palpitation also alarmed me considerably, so that I was really afraid to move. I had pains in my back and side, due to liver and kidney disorder.

"Then I was weighed down with a dull, tired feeling, making me take quite a melancholy view of life. Frequently my trials were increased by a splitting headache, and chronic constipation was a still further source of trouble. I had medical advice and medicines on many occasions, but with no good result, as in a day or two I became worse than ever.

"At last, when I was in the depths of despair, I saw in the paper the wonderful manner in which Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness had cured a case just like my own. I thought, perhaps, they might do me some good at last, and I commenced a course forthwith. Very glad am I now that I did so, for a few boxes have made me feel like a new woman. The pain in the head and back very soon went, and I found my appetite gradually returning. There was no more of that depressing, uncomfortable feeling after meals. At nights I slept very much better, and when I did rise in the morning I felt refreshed, and equal to the day's tasks. My increase in strength was very marked. It was a great relief to me to have no more of the palpitation. That has now gone entirely. I now feel better in health than I have done for years, and this I owe entirely to Chas. Forde's Bile Beans. I can conscientiously recommend them to other sufferers."

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As GOOD AS KILLED.—"Och, murder, I'm kilt entirely!" exclaimed an Irish soldier at the battle of Salamanca. "Are you wounded?" asked his officer. "Wounded, is it, yer honour? Be the powers, I'm worse than kilt out and out. Wasn't I waitin' for the last quarter of an hour for a pull at Jim Murphy's pipe? An', then, now it's shot out of his mouth!"

A Trick that Failed.

"To make an egg stand on end without breaking the shell, place a small looking-glass level on the table, face upward. Take a fresh egg, shake it violently, so that the white and yolk mix; then place it upon the point, and it will stand in equilibrium."

This was a newspaper paragraph young Wickwire read in an evening paper, and, as he was fond of parlour magic, he carefully cut out the paragraph for future reference.

A few days after that he was invited to a little private party at a friend's, and, as Wickwire was always called upon to help entertain wherever he might happen to be, he brushed up a few of his old chestnuts for use on this occasion.

A happy thought struck him as he ran across the newspaper cutting the afternoon before. He read it over carefully, so as to take in all the details of the trick, which he was quite sure he had pretty well fastened in his memory. As it seemed so simple, he didn't bother to test it.

During the evening Mr. Wickwire was called upon to give a little exhibition of his parlour magic. After a suitable amount of hesitancy, he did his knife-swallowing trick, and his second-sight trick, and his empty-hat trick; and then he announced he had an entirely new and novel trick that he was about to produce for the first time. At this everyone applauded, for they were all heartily tired of the old tricks.

"Will you please get me an egg and a small mirror?" asked Mr. Wickwire of the hostess. "Certainly," was the reply.

When the hostess asked the cook for an egg, she found there was not one in the house, so the girl was sent over to a neighbour's for one.

When the egg arrived, Wickwire held it up where all could see it, made a few mysterious passes, uttered some incomprehensible words, and began shaking it. After he thought he had it shaken up enough, he stood it on its point on the mirror; but for some mysterious reason the egg toppled over.

Then his audience smiled, and some one was rude enough to ask if that was his new trick, and if he had thought it all out himself. That made Wickwire a little hot. He said some one must have been shaking the table. Nevertheless, he thought best to take up the egg and shake it again.

After a while he tried balancing it again, and again the egg fell over as though it were tired.

"If you want to stand it up, why don't you break the shell?" asked some one.

But Wickwire said nothing. He was busy enough trying to balance that egg and keeping from getting hot. He ran over the newspaper cutting again in his mind, to be sure he was all right. Then he tried it again, and again the egg rolled over like a tired tramp.

Wickwire had about concluded that this egg must be an abnormal monstrosity of some kind, but out of sheer desperation he grabbed it for another shake.

"He has to shake it three times for luck," whispered a spectator, audibly, and Wickwire, in the agony of despair, gave a more desperate shake than ever.

The final shake settled it. The secret was out—and so was the overdone egg juice. The shaking up had generated enough gas, aided by Wickwire's hands, to burst the shell to smithereens.

The fluid ran down over Mr. Wickwire's person and over his shirt-front. It also made its presence felt in another way—that made all the visitors weary and want to go home without stopping to take any refreshments.

The majority of them did start out into the gloaming to revel in the fresh air of the front garden, but they did not get out quick enough to see the neighbour's small boy climbing over the fence from his hiding-place under the window. The small boy had merely lent the servant girl the only real ripe egg in the house, and had followed along after to see the fun.

THE BLUES.

That form of mental depression known as the blues assails almost every one, often unexpectedly, and comes to make the afflicted one most melancholy. You often hear, "I have the blues," and that explains the downcast features, the most hopeless pessimism, and the greatest soul-stirring grief. The blues often come without cause, and not only is the sufferer made miserable, but those associated with that individual are affected by the real or imaginary clouds. The blues sometimes herald illness, or are the result of bad health, but in many cases they are neither. They are a habit, which, if allowed to settle down, will ruin an otherwise sunny disposition. A cloudy day gives some women the blues, overtiring household duties depress others, but usually they "just come." There are not many people who enjoy being miserable, especially women who know the charm of a good disposition. Three things are necessary for the promotion of happiness: First, a philosophical way of looking at fate; second, contentment with one's lot; third, optimism. It is the privilege of every one to "sing and rejoice always." Songs of happiness banish clouds; smiles force depression away. Two opposite forces cannot rule over individual natures at the same time; and if happiness prevail, sorrow can have no place in the heart. The blues, allowed to remain, become settled melancholy which increases with years, and absorbs greedily the slightest semblance of happiness, until this beautiful world becomes a darkened prison which has been built by one's own consent. The drinking of tea gives some people the blues, and where this is the cause it should not be taken. Fresh air, and if possible a sunbath, often will banish all mental depression and helps one to smile the blues away.

ASPIRATION.

Be Thou our Goal to-day!
For other goals we often-times have striven.
To other goals our best has oft been given:
But still the soul,
On earth and earth's support alone relying,
Yet findeth earth's best wealth unsatisfying,
Be Thou our Goal!

In restless search for ease;
For peace, for pleasure, or what'er doth tend
But to attainment of some earthly end,
The hand may find
The envied prize for which it blindly straineth
Is lost and gone, and all that now remaineth
Is formless wind.

"Send out Thy Light," we pray;
Apart from Thee, earth's shadows round us grow,
In isolation none can forward go;
But when the soul
Is bound to Thee, she findeth new relations
And tasteth joy in sternest situations,
Be Thou our Goal!

A WORTHLESS OR A WORTHY LIFE?

Suppose you say to yourself: "This is an ordinary, shabby life of mine to look at—no great thing to do or be, or hope for or grow to. I have just got to content myself with drudgeries that must be every day the same, and never advance me beyond themselves. But I mean to put great cheer into all I do. I mean everything shall show integrity, shall speak of honesty, shall prove my truth; nothing that I touch that I will not adorn by some grace of soul." What will be the result? Where will be the paltriness, the worthlessness, of your life?

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Facetiae

NOT BACILLI.—Careful Housekeeper: "Have you boiled the drinking water?" Faithful Servant: "Yes'm." "And sterilised the milk?" "Yes'm." "What is this in the soup?" "Oh, that isn't no bacillus, mum. That is only a cockroach."

SUBLINE COURAGE.—"Young man," said the stern father, "do you think you are able to support a family?" "Well," said the young man, bravely, "I have thought that all over, and I have come to the conclusion that I am willing to endure Lillian's family for the sake of Lillian herself."

PASSING OF A STAR.—"Madam," said the facetious boarder, "this turkey reminds me of a steadily waning dramatic star." "Well," said the landlady, "I suppose you want somebody to ask you why." "Because," said the facetious boarder, "it comes on in smaller and yet smaller parts."

THEY PETTY COMPLAINT.—Visitor: "I am most grieved to learn of your mistress's illness. Nothing serious; no great cause for alarm, I trust?" The New French Maid: "No, monsieur; nothing big, nothing grande. Somezing—what you call little, petite." Visitor: "What is it?" The New French Maid: "Eet is what zey call so little—small—smallpox."

"A MAN'S work is from sun to sun," and woman's work descends from daughter to daughter.

A LAD walked eighteen miles in his sleep the other day. That boy has the making of an ideal policeman.

SHOEMAKERS say there is nothing like leather. If they will try the ordinary breakfast they will find an excellent substitute.

PROOF.—"Pork was held in high favour before the Flood." "How do you know?" "Eve was a spare rib and Noah named one of his kids Ham."

IN A BOARDING HOUSE.—First Boarder: "Don't eat so many cherries; you'll spoil your dinner." Second Boarder: "No, I won't; the cook will do that for me."

"Do you have good drinking water here?" asked a stranger in Kentucky. "Guess it's pretty good," replied the native, "never seems to hurt the horses nor cattle."

He (feeling his way): "I—I wish we were good friends enough for you to—to call me by my first name." She (helping him along): "Oh, your last name is good enough for me."

"In what part of the body is the liver?" asked a teacher, while examining the class in physiology; and she was a good deal surprised when the tall boy replied, "South of the lungs."

Gems

To watch self-consciousness and think of self is like stirring up mud to clear a river, or to hunt moles instead of letting them settle. Best to think of something else.

MEN think (now) less gravely of sin, and so they superficially diagnose the world's disease, and therefore they superficially prescribe the remedy.

HE who seeks after what is impossible ought in justice to be denied what is possible.

WE live in anticipation; realisation comes with death.

YOU cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one.

IF your bottle is full of self, God cannot pour Himself into it; empty, empty it of self, and God will fill it.

CERTAINLY love is the force by which, and home the place in which, God chiefly fashions souls to their fine issues.

IT is by his personal conduct that any man of ordinary power will do the greatest amount of good that is in him to do.

MORE OF HIS KIND.—"What is your husband's politics?" asked the new neighbour. "Jim!" said the lady addressed. "Jim? He's an anti." "Anti-what?" "No; not anti-what; jist a anti. He's agin anything that happens to be."

HAM'S LAMENT.—"This is rough luck," said Ham, mournfully, as he leaned out over the side of the ark. "What's wrong now?" queried Shem. "Why, all this water to fish in," replied Ham, "and only two fishin' worms on board."

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Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

A. S. (Greenwich).—I am afraid this reply will be too late to be of much service to you. If you have a tenant who does not pay his rent regularly you can distrain on his goods for the amount due. If after this he does not quit the house, proper notice having been served in writing, you can apply to the magistrate for an ejectment order.

IGNORANCE.—Really, I cannot tell you what a young lady means when she squeezes your hand in dancing.

MYRA.—Go back to your husband, by all means, and remember it takes two to make a quarrel, so never answer him when he speaks harshly to you.

INVITED GUEST.—When congratulating a bride and bridegroom, one usually wishes the bride great happiness; to the groom you could say, "You are a lucky man, I congratulate you most heartily."

JEANETTE.—Yes, you may ask the young man with whom you are so well acquainted to spend an evening at your home. Such a course may be pursued with entire propriety, provided there is an older person present to act as chaperone.

CAREY ONE.—Use your own judgment in dealing with the person who seems so anxious to possess a goodly portion of your savings. It does not seem possible that any sensible business man would be willing to sell an article at one-third its actual value.

TOM.—As a rule, men do not wear engagement rings. It is a foreign custom, more noticeable among the Germans, for married men to wear a wedding ring on the third finger of the left hand, and there are some Hebrews who wear engagement rings on this finger. Since it is the engagement finger, there seems to be no reason why you should not emulate their example if you wish to.

UNREQUITED.—You are just at an impressionable age and require to act with tact. You want me to tell you how to attract a young man with whom you are in love and to make him love you in return. Well, I should recommend you to cultivate in your personality all the sweet, womanly charms which make girlhood attractive, and a certain amount of apparent indifference for the gentleman. I know of no better way to captivate your hero.

SUE.—You wish to know the duties of a bridesmaid, especially as to the handling of the bride's veil. The veil is turned back after the ceremony is finished. The bride and bridesroom head the procession after the marriage service, the bridesmaid and groomsmen—or best man—following. You remain standing at the left side of the bride. When the wedding ring is placed on her finger you are supposed to hold her bouquet as well as her gloves. You stand at the left side of the bride, and do not change your position at the altar.

HOUSEKEEPER.—It will be some time before the stone steps regain their natural colour, as they have been so long neglected, but to expedite matters you might try the following method:—Sift through a fine sieve equal parts of powdered pumice-stone and whiting, and double the quantity (that is, two parts) of common soda. Mix with water to a paste, and apply with a coarse flannel, rubbing well; then wash off with clean hot water and dry thoroughly. Repeat this daily until the steps become a better colour.

STUDENT.—A creaking hinge can be cured by the use of a black lead pencil of the softest number, the point rubbed into all the crevices of the hinge.

TROUBLED WIFE.—A deserter can be arrested at any time, and claimed by the military authorities, no matter how long he has been away from the Army.

M. W. F. D.—You can only shut your cat up. Your neighbours can do as they like in their own premises; if they put the poison in your yard you can interfere.

VERNON.—If your brother does not make a will and you survive him, you, as his next-of-kin, will be entitled to whatever he leaves; your claim will come before anyone else's.

ANXIOUS MABEL.—There is no law which forces a daughter to maintain her parents, but she should hardly want a stranger's advice about the advisability of helping either her father or mother.

CLERK.—In book-keeping the only entries which change their sides when transferred are those known as "fictitious entries," made to balance an account. Of course, in transferring such an account, the entry is placed on the side where it properly belongs.

IRA B.—You may use a brown pencil with good effect to darken your eyebrows. Unless your hand is very steady, however, it is better to let someone else do the work, as the slightest unevenness spoils the entire result. If you prefer a dye, use the following:—Pyrogallie acid, 4oz.; distilled water (hot), 14oz.; dissolve, and when cool, add rectified spirits, 4oz.; dilute the mixture when using with twice its quantity of soft water, and add a little rectified spirits; apply with a soft brush, taking care not to let any drop in the eyes. It stains, of course, and the effect is gained by repeated applications.

GOLDEN TRESSER.—Peroxide of hydrogen is the best method for producing the light golden shade of hair. Use it as follows:—Get a bottle of chemically pure peroxide of hydrogen. Before making the application the hair should be thoroughly washed and dried. Wash the hair with the beaten yolk of an egg to which has been added a teaspoonful of whisky and a pint of warm rain water. Pour a little of the peroxide into a saucer, apply to the roots of the hair, and gently force it into the scalp by constant rubbing. You must regulate the colour by your own observation. One application will produce a most noticeable change. Never use ammonia in connection with oxide of hydrogen. Used carefully and pure, peroxide is harmless.

MRS. STUART.—I should not advise the use of cold cream, as it is apt to gather and aid in filling the pores of the skin with dust. Every night give your child a sponge bath with warm water and castile soap, after which rub her well with olive oil, high wine, and quinine mixed in suitable proportions by a chemist. Stimulate the flesh by gentle but firm rubbing. In the morning sponge her off with water that has stood in a warm room overnight, in which to each quart a teaspoonful of sea salt has been dissolved. This should in a short time entirely cure your child of rough skin, and at the same time act as a tonic. See that she gets outdoor exercise every day, and give her nourishing food without pastry or much sweet, rich food, or too much meat. Give her broths, rice, and all vegetables that are easy to digest.

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* * ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 50-52, Ludgate Hill, E.C.

* * We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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